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ABSTRACT

Designed for media specialists and educators, this issue includes seven articles focusing on humanistic films for children. Following a brief editorial encouraging the ideals of humanism, the first article presents an analysis of seven films with positive sex-role models. Included is a model for evaluating children's films. The second article describes an interview with master artist and storyteller, Gerald McDermott, about his work as a filmmaker. The third article describes a film/poetry activity in which 10 films were shown to fourth graders in an economically depressed area to evaluate quality, interest level, and problems of the films. The fourth article provides descriptions of 16 films about people with handicaps in which the abilities rather than the disabilities of the people are portrayed. The fifth article recommends two books about media education that can be used as references. The sixth article presents a list of short 16mm films that are adaptations of literature or folktales. Eighteen short 16mm films, ranging from brief lyrical works and narrative dramas to documentaries, are reviewed in the final article, the film review supplement. (LH)

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young viewers

Summer/Fall 1981

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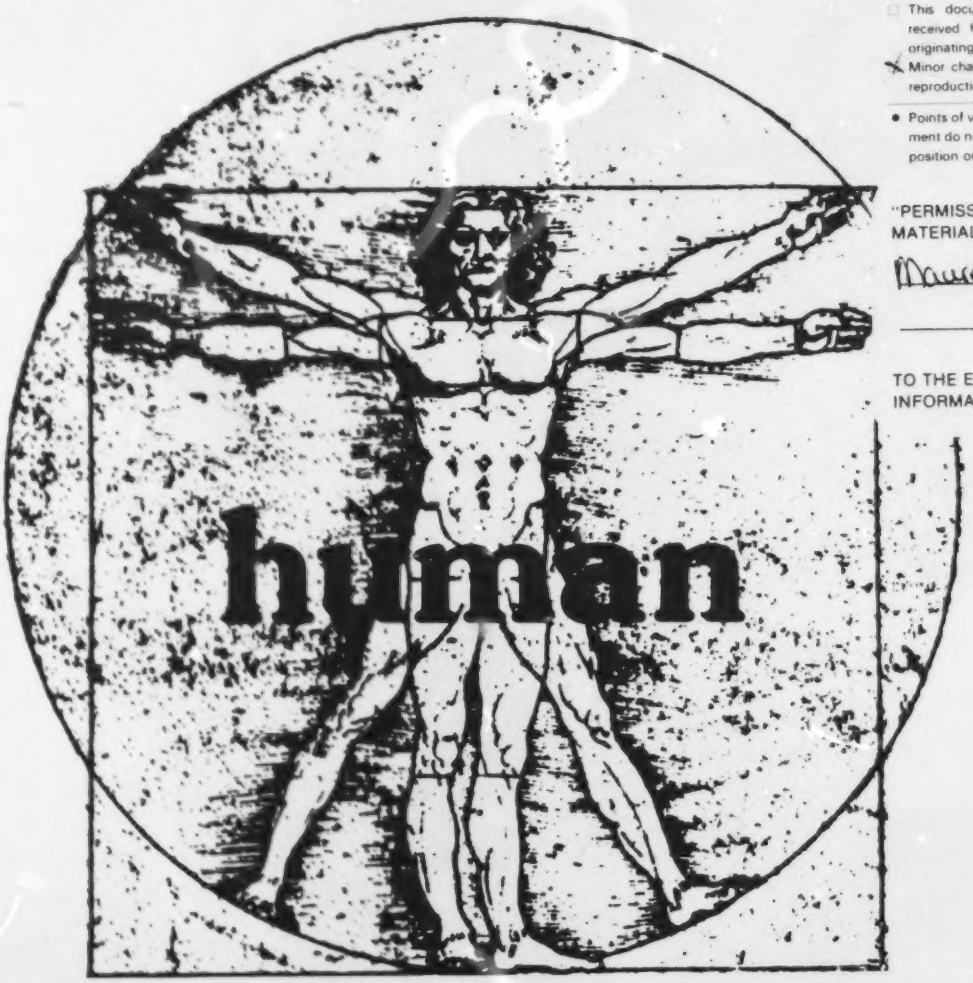
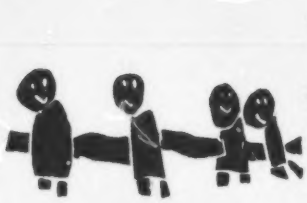


humanistic films



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Maureen Gaffney, Editor; Molly Hankwitz, Managing Editor; Merrill Lee Fuchs, Assistant Editor.

contents

The focus of this issue of Young Viewers is on humanistic films for children. In our use of the word, humanistic describes those films with a positive view of human potential, an obvious concern for the individual children and adults portrayed in them, and a respect for the viewing audience. Humanistic films for children -- even animated works -- place primary emphasis on their human content, rather than on slick filmmaking techniques; when the films are well-made they exhibit a directness and warmth that is unusual in educational materials for children. The filmmakers who create these works are a special group; they turn all their skills toward communicating to young people about matters of general human interest -- matters which also have personal significance for the filmmakers. Humanistic films do not follow a formula. They are individual human expressions about important subjects.

We use humanistic to describe the films with positive sex-role models which Ellen Schecter discusses in her lead article. The term applies to the works Salvatore Parlato recommends -- films depicting people with handicaps which allow viewers to experience their disabilities as well as their human dignity and courage. Similarly humanistic describes Gerald McDermott's outstanding body of films, and many of the works included in the Film Review Supplement.

4 PRECIOUS FEW: A Celebration and Analysis of Films for Children with Positive Sex-Role Models
by Ellen Schecter. Ms. Schecter is a writer of books, film scripts, and television materials for children. Her work has been published by Scholastic Magazine Press and her reviews have appeared in The New York Times. Her media projects have aired on CBS, PBS, and Nickelodeon, the Warner-Amex Cable channel for children.

7 MASTER ARTIST, MASTER STORYTELLER: An Interview with Gerald McDermott
by Maureen Gaffney. Ms. Gaffney is Executive Director of the Media Center for Children, Inc.

9 FEAR AND ELATION IN P.S. 105: A Film/Poetry Activity
by Anne Munzer Bourne. Ms. Bourne has an M.A. in Special Education from the University of Southern California and is working to develop a special hospital project for the Media Center.

11 WITH COURAGE AND DIGNITY: Films about People with Handicaps
by Salvatore Parlato. Mr. Parlato is Media Education Coordinator for Captioned Films for the Deaf in Silver Springs, Maryland. He is author of Films -- Too Good for Words and Films Ex Libris.

13 TAKING MATTERS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS: Two Books about Making Media
by Margo Cornelius. Ms. Cornelius coordinates video services at the Port Washington Public Library. She has taught video production in schools, libraries and community centers for the past six years.

14 EX LIBRIS: Transforming Literature into Film
by Maureen Gaffney. Ms. Gaffney is Executive Director of the Media Center for Children, Inc.

21 FILM REVIEW SUPPLEMENT (Number 5)
Eighteen short 16mm films reviewed by MCC staff and film evaluation interns range from brief, lyrical works and narrative dramas to documentaries. The film titles are as follows:

THE FLASHETTES
THE GINGERBREAD MAN
ICE
ISLE OF JOY
IT'S SO NICE TO HAVE A WOLF AROUND THE HOUSE
KELLY
LITTLE BIG TOP
LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD
THE MAGIC FLUTE
THE MOLE AND THE EGG
MURATTI GREIFT EIN
OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER
PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY
PONIES OF MIKAELENGI
TRANSFER
VOLCANO: BIRTH OF A MOUNTAIN

[Correction: The distributor for SOMETHING QUEER AT THE LIBRARY which was reviewed in the last Film Review Supplement is Churchill Films, 662 North Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles CA 90069.]

Young Viewers

Summer/Fall 1981

CORRECTIONS for Volume 4, Numbers 3-4

Please excuse the errors which appear in this issue of Young Viewers, corrections for which are listed by page below. We must have been bitten by a printer's devil. Our apoligies to all.

On page 2, two titles were omitted from the list of films in the Film Review Supplement. These titles were LAURIE and THE WONDER RING.

On page 19, the film JEALOUSY is available from Coe Films only for television and cable airing; it is available for rental from Association Films, 410 Great Road, Littleton MA 01460. For preview and purchase contact Communications Park Video and Film, Box 4000, Mount Kisco NY 10549.

On page 25, omit Center for the Humanitites as distributor of LAURIE and add Scholastic Magazine, 904 Sylvan Avenue, Englewood Cliffs NJ 07632.

On page 32, under Distributors, please add The Museum of Modern Art, 22 West 54th Street, NYC. Delete Center for the Humanities and substitute Scholastic Magazine (address as above).

editorial

in defense of humanism

The 1969 Random House Dictionary defines humanism as a mode of thought or action in which human interests, values, and dignity predominate. Last March, when Ellen Schecter and I discussed her lead article for this issue of Young Viewers, we agreed that the most appropriate word to describe positive sex-role models was humanistic. The more commonly used term, non-sexist, was both too negative and too small in scope. Thus, in the broadest and most positive sense, we called this issue "Humanistic Films". It is ironic that, in the few months since then, the words humanism, humanist, and humanistic have, in certain circles, become bad words.

On May 17th, I first learned that humanist was being used pejoratively. A headline almost leaped from the front page of the Sunday New York Times: "Parents' Groups Purging Schools of 'Humanist' Books and Classes." In a provocative article, Dana Kleinman reported that groups in different sections of the country were employing search-and-destroy techniques to rid public schools and libraries of materials they decried as humanistic. To replace the materials they objected to, conservative parents' groups were demanding "...history texts that emphasize the positive side of America's past, economics courses that stress the strengths of capitalism, and literature that avoids divorce... and other harsh realities of life."

Other conservative organizations, spurred on by the group which calls itself "The Moral Majority", have all but declared war against humanism and, as it is also called, secular humanism, a belief system largely defined by what it is not. Apparently, humanists do not believe in God; a frequently cited proof of this is that many believe in evolution. Humanists do not support the moral values taught by parents and church. Humanists certainly do not adhere rigidly to the fundamentalist line; they do, according to Weep for Your Children, "...believe in suicide, abortion, divorce, euthanasia, and complete sexual freedom to commit adultery, fornication and all types of sex perversion." Reverend Tim Le Haye, head of "The California Moral Majority", sums up the problem in The Battle of the Mind. "Most of the evils in the world today can be traced to humanism," says Le Haye, "which has taken over our government, the U.N., education, TV and most of the other influential things in life."

For "The Moral Majority" and kindred groups, humanism is anathema. Their use of the word, however, is extremely confusing. If you pare down the sensationalist and often contradictory rhetoric, it becomes obvious that these self-proclaimed moralists label anyone who does not believe as they do "a humanist". The New Right's highly organized outcry and action against humanism is but a rallying point in an insidious campaign against freedom of inquiry, freedom of expression, and freedom of choice. Those freedoms are the real targets.

Because the Media Center for Children cares a great deal about the welfare of children, we feel we must defend the traditional concept of humanism and the American right of freedom of speech. The book bannings, blacklists, and other censorship tactics being promoted by "The Moral Majority" and similar groups in the name of children will in no way benefit children. Rather, these tactics will do them serious harm. We live in a society, founded on humanistic principles, which encourages and legally assures the rights of people of all religions, all philosophies, and all political persuasions to express their views. Making choices, and educating children so that they can make choices, is therefore both a necessity and a responsibility. As President Giamatti of Yale University told the incoming freshman class this August, living in a pluralistic democracy like ours can be messy and wearying; but it is better than the alternative now being advanced by the New Right -- a movement Giamatti characterized as "...a cry of exhaustion, a longing for surcease from the strain of managing complexity."

Courage! Courage to continue -- I wish this for you and for myself. In the face of the inevitable complexity of this modern, technological, pluralistic, and messy democracy, let us find the courage to preserve our American ideals of humanism, freedom of inquiry, freedom of expression, and freedom of chioce. They are our children's most valuable legacy.

Maureen Gaffney, Editor

precious few

a celebration and analysis of films for children with positive sex-role models

by ellen schecter

Remember the not-so-good old days when we first realized that Dick, Jane, and most of their siblings on celluloid not only reinforced but taught sexism to generation after generation of children? Our newly raised consciousness protested as we catalogued the vast number of passive little girls full of sugar and spice and everything nice...who stood around watching while little boys had all the fun chasing snakes, snails, and puppydog tails.

In the scramble to find or create non-sexist films, we eagerly pointed with pride (or at least relief) to any film that was even remotely liberated. Any portrayal of a stalwart girl, a gentle boy, or a non-stereotypical adult was like finding fresh water in a wasteland.

Today, when there are still precious few excellent films for children, token "non-sexist" films with overt feminist messages but little else to recommend them are not enough. A non-sexist film--like any other--must be excellent on other counts or it simply won't work. Children know the difference between quality and schlock even when some adults don't.

During a recent inventory of my favorite films for children, I made a startling and pleasant discovery: these excellent films not only work for me and for most children, but they are also non-sexist. This seems to have little to do with whether or not they set out to display explicitly non-sexist values, or whether or not they deliver a message about liberation. I'd like to share a few titles at the top of my list--along with my thoughts and feelings about why these films work so well.*

I'd like to go even further, and try to coin a new phrase to describe this innovative, rare, entirely welcome breed of films which offers girls and boys visions of human beings whose characters, problems, quests, and destinies are not defined or limited by their biology; films which explore relationships between people whose feelings, thoughts, and accomplishments may be shaped--but are never distorted--by their sexual identities. Because I prefer not to define something so richly positive in negative terms--to define such films by what they are not--I prefer to think of such films as humanistic instead of non-sexist.

Down to Basics

FRIENDS by Pieter Van Deusen is almost one of a kind: it is a film about girls--only girls. It's also one of the best serious children's films I know. Despite the superstition that boys won't watch or read stories about the opposite sex, I bet they will stick with this one. Girls' attention will be riveted to the screen.

The friends in the story aren't very good at friendship. They are caught up in the kind of perpetual, agonizing, multiple tug of war that wracks childhood. In FRIENDS, as in the real world, conflicts arise from each girl's distinctive and problematic personality quirks, which are clearly defined from the film's start but are in no way sex-linked. Nancy is undisputed leader of the pack: bossy and bratty, she is a tightly-wired dynamo with an acid tongue. Sarah is an unwilling loner--a shy, pale, lumpy girl who asks too openly for playmates. Mara is soft, wispy--a doer as well as a dreamer, but too gentle to hold her own against Nancy's take-over behavior.

The film offers several episodes in what must be a continuing drama. Ignoring Sarah, Nancy and Mara build a home-made tent in the backyard then go inside to tell jokes, horror stories, and exchange secrets. Mara shares her treasure trove of found objects, telling Nancy, "I've never shown anybody [these] before."

Next day, the triangle shifts balance. Mara rejects Sarah's wistful invitation to keep a play date with Nancy. But despite Mara's objections Nancy turns the duo into a trio. "I want to have more than one friend," Nancy insists, "We can all play together." Mara bursts into tears. Disdainful, Nancy and Sarah call her "crybaby" and run off to join in a plum tree fight. In a rage, Mara destroys the tent. Later, when Nancy discovers Mara's treasures in the chaos, she gathers them carefully into their blue plastic bowl and pauses for the first time in her perpetual motion. The film ends as Nancy slowly climbs the steps to Mara's back door. We catch a glimpse of Mara peeking over the windowsill as Nancy knocks and calls her, but we can only guess what happens next.

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* I'm not claiming that all these films will work with all children. They are, however, films I love and would be proud to screen; they are films I think would work beautifully if presented in the right spirit. I'm also not promising that children necessarily will find them all "easy" or "fun". That's one reason why they're so good. Lots of things children face are not fun or easy; one reason too many films for children fail is because filmmakers refuse to recognize that. Children who live out there in the real world can't help but recognize it.

touchstones

Questions I ask myself--consciously or subliminally--to decide whether a film works for me and is likely to work for children. Developed through soundings against mind and heart--by listening to the child as well as the critic in me, these touchstones form a set of criteria useful in judging films for children and adults.

CHARACTERS: Do they feel real? Do I believe in them--in their conflicts, their feelings, their problems, and their solutions? Do they and their motivations bear any resemblance to children, adults, families in the real world? Do I care about what happens to characters--want them to win, care if they lose, stick with them while they grope and grow--if they ring true, tickle my funnybone, or tighten my throat. Characters that "work" usually tell me something important not only about them, but about myself and about human beings of any age.

STORY/PLOT (and even the most cold-hearted documentary has a story, whether it likes it or not): Is it convincing? Fresh? Does it matter? Or is it trivial and boringly predictable? Are there genuine feelings, quests, or questions at the heart of the matter, or is it just a string of incidents? Does it move convincingly from point to point without tripping over itself, explaining itself away, leaving gaping holes, or pasting itself together with coincidence? Are all the loose ends tied up too quickly and neatly, so questions and feelings can be shoved out of sight before they're recognized? Is it a real story or simply a bit of drapery around a not-very-hidden agenda (let's smash sexist stereotypes; let's jump on this year's bandwagon; let's teach kids to love _____ --you fill in the blank.)

SCRIPT: Is it graceful and well-written? Will the language work for the intended audience? Does it make sense within the rules it sets up for itself? (Even the goofiest humor, even a script without a word spoken must make sense, especially for children, within its own logical, emotional, or humorous framework.) Does it grapple with real feelings, real issues? Does it present real people speaking real words instead of cliches? Is it steeped in love for the spoken word? (This does not mean self-conscious, self-indulgent, or curliqued eloquence.)

ACTING: If it looks or sounds like acting, it's no good. If the actors--adults or children--behave the way people usually do on camera but rarely do in real life, it's bad acting. But if they move, gesture, talk and (most important) pause the way human beings do, then they begin to feel real. If we can see them in process--feeling their way through a thought or emotion; deciding on their next move--maybe even scratching a nose or picking a hangnail while they decide--then it's good acting.

DIRECTION and POST-PRODUCTION: Myriad small creative choices made by the director form the backbone, not just the background, of a film. The sum of these parts will make or break it; assure or shatter its integrity.

music: Is it appropriate? Necessary? Too noticeable? If you can predict the instruments from the title, it's probably a mundane choice.

sound effects: Do they sound real? Do they add anything? Do they demand attention? As with overly-obvious music, there is often something wrong when they do.

editing: Is pacing appropriate to content and audience? Does it help clarify the story? Does it trigger yawns, or make you feel so "wired" you dare not blink? Is there visual logic--even a beauty-- to the images?

props, costumes, lighting: If details like this are right, you shouldn't notice them (except with pleasure). If they are wrong, they poke out like sore thumbs.

THE MISSING PIECES: You can gauge a great deal about a director's attitudes and artistry by what's there as well as what's deliberately missing. Does the director understand that communicating with a child audience doesn't mean speaking down? That simplifying doesn't meant being simplistic? Does s/he risk some quiet, or cram the soundtrack with gratuitous, wall-to-wall music, sound effects and jabber? Excellent films avoid taking up all the seats on the bus; they leave room for the audience to come along. They invite each individual watcher to enter the picture, leaving room for something to happen in the eyes, brain, heart of the beholder. The most cherished and durable works of art are those that provide the richest possibilities for personal resonance. Movies for children should be no exception.

FRIENDS is so real it could be a documentary based on the stock footage of my memory. The girls give "award-winning" performances--so accurate one can hardly believe there's a script, director, or camera. Although the sound is sometimes poor and muffled, when the dialogue cuts through it cuts deep. These are real girls who scratch their scabs and get wisps of hair mixed up with their sandwiches; who walk one-foot-on, one-foot-off the curb--the way children really do.

And here, praises be, are girls that play strenuously as well as imaginatively; who are ingenious and aggressive; who make and build and break, fight and feud as well as cry. Here are characters who run the gamut from wispy to waspish, from nice to nasty, in ways that are rooted in personality rather than biology. None of these girls is entirely attractive; this is not a pastel portrait of girls with pale, pastel feelings and pursuits. They are engaged in real problems they'll be forced to solve over and over again--just as we did. And their story matters. With its wide-open end, it gives a clear invitation for boys and girls to draw on their own feelings to decide how the story might end or continue. It gives them something real and valuble to engage with, and it's worth its weight in gold.

JEALOUSY: I WON'T BE YOUR FRIEND by Don Connor is a perfect counterpart to FRIENDS, offering insights into the ebb and flow of a boys' trio. This time, it's a different kind of triangle--a stable, established friendship between two boys is shattered by the arrival of a new boy on the block.

Tony and Julio look forward to a great summer: stickball in the street early each morning before the traffic gets heavy; lots of practice for their games on the Martin's Grocery softball team; a string-and-bell call system for instant apartment-to-apartment communication. Then Nick moves in. Tony and his crude contraption are completely upstaged by Nick and his ham radio that can tune into Puerto Rico, Alaska, "anywhere in the world!" Julio abandons pitching practice and Tony, whose pain is palpable and deep. Nick and Julio make it clear that Tony can join the admiring crowds around the radio whenever he wants, but Tony is too proud and too pained to join a triangle which shoves him to the edge of the spotlight. The film ends with the conflicts-- and several possible solutions--clearly suggested but unresolved. As in real life, there is no easy solution when the dilemma lies in the particular characters who create it. Without a neat wrap-up, children are left with plenty to sink their teeth into and work on.

As in FRIENDS, JEALOUSY brings up important subjects--rivalry, dignity, sensitivity to others, the tricky business of peace-making. It poses its questions clearly, realistically, straightforwardly--in the context of play, where children spend so much of their time and energy. The film speaks with equal relevance to both girls and boys (though there isn't a girl in sight), through characters which, with minimal rewriting, could be cast in the opposite sex.

JEALOUSY makes the point, without sledgehammering, that boys have strong capacities for attachment, along with deep, sometimes painful feelings they don't quite know how to handle. Yet these boys don't resort to violence to express or resolve their conflicts; even in an inner-city neighborhood, choosing and losing friends isn't a matter of muscle or macho. The newest guy on the block--the one who's causing all the trouble--isn't a jock or a smoothie, but a small, meek, brainy boy with glasses.

While the entire film is excellent, the script and acting are particularly fine. Every production detail is artfully chosen--from the streetsweeping machine that wakes Tony as the film opens, to the gaggle of black and brown boys cavorting around an open hydrant, to the little squirts who watch with adulation as Tony and Julio practice pitching. The boys are directed with sensitivity and subtlety; their actions and reactions are completely believable. Tony's pain is understated but so authentic that one can't help hurting with him. And though he never says much, his actions create a deft and well-shaded picture of a little boy with a great, big, believable heartache.

Some Real Treasures

It's hard to find films that help boys as well as girls with issues about sex-roles and behavior. How--and why--will boys change if they don't know what the payoffs will be; if they don't have some role models to show them how? Here are strong, well-made films that answer some of these needs.

HOPSCOTCH by Robert Churchill is a witty, wily animated film that explores the follies of the macho stance in ways that children will understand. Suitable for use in primary through junior high grades (perhaps even beyond), the film risks showing negative as well as positive male models and turns out all the stronger for it. It dares admit that boys are taught different lessons than girls about how they should or could behave. HOPSCOTCH also suggests some of the joyful payoffs that asking, and thus becoming vulnerable, can bring.

Without a word (the soundtrack is all child-made sound effects and gibberish), HOPSCOTCH tells the adventures of a group of crayon-colored children. The protagonist is a Bright Green Boy with a shock of orange hair, first observed as a bored and gentle little fellow waiting for something or someone to come along and rescue him from his lonliness. He hums, yawns, plays catch by himself, and watches with wonder when a bright butterfly pauses on his baseball.

Hope appears when a long-legged Purple Girl and her squat Magenta sidekick (an androgynous figure who turns out to be a younger boy) come laughing up the street. With scarcely a glance at the Green Boy, they begin drawing a hopscotch grid.

Green Boy turns into an animated hieroglyph of the macho boy's role that the film is questioning. Hungry for attention and companionship, he hauls out the heavy artillery. He shows off his toys, his strength, his athletic prowess; displays his cleverness, naughtiness, and ingenuity. He fantasizes how he can dazzle them with his macho daring; then, how they'll pity and pamper him after his motorcycle crackup. He imagines alternate selves (pilot, rockstar, football hulk) that they might find more attractive. He's rough, he's tough, and Purple Girl swats him when he gets too far out of line.

His tour de force proves how silly boys can be when they "act like boys." But HOPSCOTCH also shows the soft underbelly of the show-off, delivering a clear and tender message: this boy wants to play; he just doesn't know how to ask. At last, Green Boy takes a mental inventory and figures out what's wrong. He stops the nonsense and starts being himself: a lonely, rather nice little boy with a Woody Allen smile and a need for friends.

The girls finally ask him to play and "onesies" is a shining moment.

Because he has seen through his own act, Green Boy can share a laugh on common ground with his new friends when Blue Boy "vrooms" up on his bike and starts the ridiculous cycle all over again.

Personally, I might prefer it if Green Boy used his savvy as outsider-turned-insider to make things easier for Blue Boy. But the filmmakers may be one step ahead of me: this may be one of those essential missing pieces that children in the audience can pick up and parley into a discovery of their own.

HOPSCOTCH takes a big subject and makes it child-size without reducing it. It plays out themes in age-appropriate ways, in a clear and amusing story (that is perhaps a shade too long). The nonsense soundtrack makes perfect sense, the gibberish provides plenty of room for viewers to imagine their own dialogue. The body language is so precise that words would be superfluous.

This film speaks clearly to both girls and boys, suggesting that boys can ask as well as demand; that friendliness can be a more effective tool than force to get--and enjoy--what you want.

THE HIDEOUT by George McQuilkin never set out to deliver a non-sexist message; yet it ranks among the most completely humanistic films for children I

Continued on page 16.

8

master artist, master storyteller:

an interview with gerald mcdermott

by maureen gaffney

Gerald McDermott is both an author/illustrator and a filmmaker with an outstanding body of work. Although he may be better known to the general public through his many folktale books, it is on his work as a filmmaker that I will focus this interview.

The image of going on a journey is the most constant motif in Gerald McDermott's outstanding folktale films. Carried with this journey-image is the motif of self-definition, of self-discovery. These explorations -- both outward and inward -- are the key to understanding his films; they are also, I suspect, the key to understanding the man.

THE STONECUTTER, McDermott's first film, is an ironic reminder to be content with who you are; but the character of the lonely stonecutter stands in sharp contrast to the characters in his later works, all of whom are clearly involved in family situations.

ANANSI THE SPIDER, the Ashanti trickster/hero, is rescued from danger by his six resourceful sons. The Congolese tale, THE MAGIC TREE, is about Movumgu, an unloved and ugly twin, who seeks happiness away from his mother's home and finds a magical princess for his loving wife. In the Pueblo myth, ARROW TO THE SUN, a Phaeton-Christ figure leaves his earthly village to find his divine father. And, in the Greek legend, SUN FLIGHT, Dedalus helps his son, Icarus, escape from the labyrinth of Minos, but to the man's great sadness, the boy does not survive the escape flight.

McDermott's films reveal a fine understanding of and respect for the folk traditions upon which they are based -- a respect communicated to all viewers, young and old alike. And, while the films make interesting use of traditional instrumentation, it is their imagery -- brilliant colors and contemporary designs abstracted from folk sources -- that is most compelling. This imagery, and his poetic handling of folklore themes, are McDermott's hallmarks.

Let's start from the beginning. How and why did you become an artist?

Becoming an artist was simply the outgrowth of a childhood fascination with drawing and painting. From the very beginning, this was an important emotional outlet for me. My way of making a link with the world, with other people, was through images. This tendency manifested itself very early in my life; by the time I was four years old my parents had enrolled me in a studio school at the Detroit Institute of Art. I began studying art then and it simply continued throughout my life.

I also performed on radio for a while when I was nine or ten years old. I got a tremendous charge out of communicating that way (putting on a show) and became fascinated with the tools of communicating -- music, sound effects and dramatics. However, I didn't use those tools until I began to experiment with liveaction 16mm films as a teenager.

My friends and I got together when we were teenagers to make movies. That was in the late fifties. We borrowed equipment, wrote scripts, performed, and edited story films that had beginnings, middles, and ends.

There was a museum in Detroit that had a reconstruction of 19th Century streets. We convinced the curator of the museum to let us film a movie there. It was actually a parody of silent comedies. The museum even lent us authentic costumes from their vaults.

Were you studying filmmaking in school at that time?

No. Despite the fact that I went to a public high school with a special emphasis on the arts, my filmmaking activity was extra-curricular. I tried a few animation experiments on my own and eventually got a job after school hours in an animation studio doing background art for television commercials in order to learn some of the techniques.

The year before I got the job, however, I discovered that this studio existed. It was in a big, old building near downtown Detroit, close to my school. This studio would, periodically, discard thousands of animation cels which accumulated during production. As far as the studio was concerned, the cels were simply taking up space.

There was a huge brick incinerator behind the building which housed the studio, and every month thousands of cels would be thrown into the cold incinerator. A day or so would elapse between the time they threw out the drawings and the time the incinerator would be fired. During that interval, I'd go there with two empty suitcases and climb into the incinerator where I'd put as many drawings as possible into my suitcases.

At night, in my room, I'd flip through the cels. That was my education in animation techniques. That's how I found out how animators made the little animals wiggle on-screen. Later, I started to work at the studio part-time.

A still from THE MAGIC TREE

I was very interested in learning more about film, and from high school in Detroit I went to Pratt Institute in New York. I expected that I would move onward and upward in terms of film studies. I was quite disappointed to discover that there were no film courses as Pratt at that time. So I still had to pursue filmmaking as an extra-curricular activity.

After my first year at college, I decided to make a short film during my summer at home. I went to a childhood storybook, picked out a favorite tale -- which happened to be a Japanese folktale -- and worked all summer doing the cels. I photographed it at the studio I had been freelancing for; the people there let me use their 35mm Oxbury as a gesture toward helping out a young filmmaker. The result was THE STONECUTTER, a six-minute animation and my first film. It set me on the path of making a series of films on myths and folktales.

Your animation style is very unusual. How did it evolve?

There were several influences.... The UPA films of the fifties had a tremendous impact on me -- films like THE TELL-TALE HEART and other titles I can't remember now. I was struck by the UPA visual quality -- the bright colors, the hard edges.

I didn't like the Disney animations much; they seemed grotesque and frightening. Something about the way the characters were drawn always repulsed me -- even as a child. But, in an odd way, I was also fascinated with the Disney films -- the way one finds a nightmare compelling.

In my own mind I had another image of what animation could be like, but I had never seen it until I saw the film MOONBIRD. That was the first Hubley film I ever saw; it was the first animation I had seen with a kind of stylized and fluid quality. I was bowled over by it! Although my graphic style was in no way similar, seeing MOONBIRD somehow released me.

I had always known that my animation had to be stylized. Perhaps that was what I didn't like about Disney; he took this marvelous medium and aped reality with it. What a waste! -- to try to make animated water run like real water. A better goal would have been to make water like Matisse did in his swimming pool collage.

Oh, yes! Thinking of Matisse reminds me of another "event" which had a tremendous impact on my animation style. The year I first went to college there was a major exhibition of Matisse's collages in New York. The experience of seeing that work sent me into a tailspin! I had never, never ever, experienced anything like it. Those images and that work! Matisse nourished me for the next ten years.

His influence is very obvious in THE STONECUTTER. The film is an amalgam of the bold shapes present in Matisse's work and the textures and forms that are, in a sense, found in Eastern art.

I was struck by something I read in an exhibit catalog for Matisse's cutouts. Apparently, when he was old he got very sick; he almost died. When his health improved, he consciously resolved to spend the rest of his life making art that healed. His later art, particularly his cutouts and collages, does seem to have a sort of mystical or, at least, joyously spiritual quality.

How does that fit in with what you call, in your films, "pictures of the soul"? Do you consider your work to be spiritual in any sense?

I think all my work has been deeply spiritual in that I've been trying to pull out, from the very depths of myself, something that will touch other people on a spiritual level.

I couldn't have expressed . is when I began making films. I realized, only after I had made many films, that I had been drawn to mythology by the power of its unconscious images (unconscious in the Jungian sense of the word). In trying to recreate the dream world of myths on film, I was also pulling out the images of my own dreams and putting them on film. Perhaps it's important for the viewer to see the links between the psychologically meaningful images of the myths and the images in her/his own psyche.

I think an Irish-Catholic upbringing also had a profound impact on the type of stories I chose. I seem to have been drawn to ancient myths and folktales that strongly parallel themes from the Christian tradition.

Another important aspect of the tales I chose to make into films was the unspoken dialogue with my father. All my films are letters to my father. We shared a rapport that never took the form of words. He was, nonetheless, immensely supportive and proud of my work. So, I spoke to him through my films; through them, I told him how I was progressing in my life. I can link the making of each of my films with the precise location on the psychological path I was on at the time.

With the possible exception of THE STONECUTTER -- although it could be included as well, my first five films have a link with the father. They are also all thematically related since they are all about failed journeys. SUN FLIGHT is about the relationship between a father and a son. ANANSI THE SPIDER features a supreme father whose qualities are divided among six sons. THE MAGIC TREE is a nightmare world because of the absence of a father. And ARROW TO THE SUN is the ultimate evocation of the search and final binding with the father. What I couldn't express in words, I expressed through those images.

Continued on page 19.

A still from THE STONECUTTER

fear and elation in p.s. 105 a film/poetry activity

by anne munzer bourne

I was, as I recall it, very anxious. Perhaps a more accurate way to describe it would be excited--nervously excited. Although this was to be my fifth consecutive weekly session with the fourth grade at P.S. 105, and despite the fact that the earlier sessions had gone quite well, I was more nervous than I had been at our first encounter. Not only was I bringing the children two non-narrative and semi-abstract films, I was planning to have them do a group poetry activity as a follow-up to the screening. Naturally, part of me felt sure that things would go well, but another part of me--the part that was shaking in my shoes--feared that the whole thing films and language arts activity, would be over the children's heads.

The Film/Activity Program at 105

I should probably give you a bit of background. As part of my film evaluation internship with the Media Center for Children, I was testing two films a week at P.S. 105 in the Fort Hamilton section of Brooklyn. Sylvia Vogel, the fourth grade teacher, had asked the Media Center to bring the evaluation program to her school. While P.S. 105 was in an economically depressed area, the school had some interesting programs and some very excited and dedicated teachers. Ms. Vogel was one of the best and she wanted her class to have some media-related experiences. She was also willing to give us a period of two hours a week so that we could screen two short 16mm films, discuss them and follow the discussion with a related arts activity.

The children in her class were ethnically mixed, but predominantly Hispanic, and most had their roots in Central and South America--not Puerto Rico or Mexico as one might expect. The school's neighborhood was an out of the way blue collar, residential area on the south shore of Brooklyn. As it happened, many of the children in Ms. Vogel's class were mildly learning disabled.

For various reasons, Ms. Vogel felt that her class in particular would benefit from an enrichment program that involved more than reading and language arts activities--which is why she was so eager for the Media Center for Children to bring its film/activity program to Brooklyn.

For our first session, I screened KALEIDOFORM and MURATTI MARCHES ON (for additional film information see filmography at the end of this article and see Merrill Lee Fuchs' article "Sinkenkong and Kalamazoo" in V.4:2 of Young Viewers , the Film Review Supplement in V.4:2, and the Film Review Supplement in this issue). After viewing and discussing these two abstract kinesthetic films in which shapes move to music, I asked children to create a collage from pre-cut acetate shapes which they were instructed to arrange in repetitive (or "rhythmic") patterns.

The following week's program--OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER and PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY (reviewed in this issue)--involved two humorous liveaction portraits; they served as a stimulus to a portrait collage made of construction paper, fabric scraps, magazine cutouts and drawings. Two lively animated films, SKY DANCE: REACHING FOR LIFE IN THE COSMOS and GOD IS DOG SPELLED BACKWARDS, made up the third screening, after which the children made simple flipbooks.

At the fourth session, we screened MUDFLAT, a documentary about the outdoor junk assemblage/sculptures people make on the mudflats near San Francisco, and FELIX GETS THE CAN, a classic cartoon adventure in which everyday objects and cartoon images (such as a question mark) are cleverly transformed by the resourceful cat. As follow-up to this screening, children were asked to transform magazine pictures into other things, much the way Felix and the people of San Francisco did.

D-Day: The Fifth Screening Session

Now, here I was in my fifth evaluation session bringing these children two very demanding films and a language arts activity. I was afraid this would be D-Day--"D" for disaster. I wondered how MCC Research Director, Merrill Lee Fuchs, had talked me into doing this--we agreed that the two films I planned to screen would be difficult for most adults. How was my fourth grade going to do? I wasn't so much afraid that they would let me down--I knew this was a risky screening--but I wondered if they would think that I had let them down if things didn't go well. Would all the trust they had in me and the fine rapport we had developed be wiped out if this screening/activity did not work?

Perhaps I should describe the films before explaining what happened. THE WONDER RING by Stan Brakhage (reviewed in this issue) is a silent, liveaction catalog of images from the now-defunct Third Avenue El, a type of elevated "subway." The film opens with a series of close-up shots of objects and spaces in a run-down train station. After a slow pan around the station, camera movement accelerates and a train arrives. We, the viewers, become the camera--or at least the filmmaker--as we enter the train and travel through the city, seeing city and subway with an interesting mix of abstract reality and personal vision.

TRANSFER by Eric Durst (also in reviewed this issue) is another subway film, but that is where their similarities end. TRANSFER is animated, while THE WONDER RING is liveaction. TRANSFER uses mostly secondary colors, done with poster-like simplicity, to tell the surrealistic story of a young man's travels on the New York City subway system. There are a few moments of comic relief--especially when the everyman encounters some of the characters that populate public transportation. The film ends with a dreamlike segment where the traveler enters into a poster of the subway train and floats in the air of the picture with a parachute (sort of) and a bird.

The plan was simple enough. I would first screen THE WONDER RING and ask children to call out visual images, sounds/feelings, or action words which I would write on the blackboard. Then I would screen TRANSFER and repeat the language activity as before. Finally, by combining and altering the words and phrases on the blackboard, the children would compose a group poem on the topic of a journey. For this evaluation we had planned a tight follow-up because we expected the program to be difficult and wanted to focus the children. Hopefully, the films and activity would provide the right balance of stimulus and structure within which children could freely express themselves.

A Sort of Introduction

I felt it would be important to set a special tone for this screening, largely to clarify for the children that this session would be different from the others we had done. I wanted to avoid confusion and false expectations, so I told them that we would not be doing our usual discussion questions or arts activities. Instead we were going to try an experiment.

In my pre-screening pep-talk, I told the fourth graders that they were the most creative and imaginative group I shared films with and, for that reason, I wanted to try a special language arts activity with them. Today they would have a special opportunity to play with words instead of the art materials that we normally used. They were going to try something wild and exciting.

After that I gave what Maureen Gaffney calls a "scaffolding introduction"--an introduction that enables children to get closer to the film but which does not deprive them of the pleasure of experiencing it for themselves. I told the children we were going to screen two films, both of which had to do with journeys. I asked them to pretend they were either passengers or the filmmakers themselves, looking through the eye of the camera. Just before the film began, I told the group to talk out loud during the screening, to "tell the story" of what was happening since the film did not have any words or other sounds. The children readily accepted this suggestion--this vehicle to involve them in the film--and many were waiting impatiently with their cameras on their shoulders for the trip to begin. I announced the title and screened THE WONDER RING, during which the group described every detail of the trip.

When THE WONDER RING ended and the lights had come back on, I turned to the blackboard. In one section near the top of the board, I wrote the phrase visual images. In another section of the board, again near the top, I wrote the words sounds/feelings. In a third section I wrote action words.

I explained what I meant by each category--giving three examples (i.e., visual images: delapidated buildings; sounds/feelings: eerie screetches; and action words: whizzing). I told the children I wanted them to give me two or three words or phrases for each section.

To my surprise, I had the children's full attention. They were focused and eagerly described images from the film. Occasionally, a child would experience difficulty in verbalizing a phrase "just right." In such instances, I would give the problem back to the group and ask them to help find the appropriate words.

So far things were going well. Vivid descriptive words filled each category and the class was anxious to get to the second film. As with the first film, I told children that TRANSFER did not have a story with words and I asked them to tell the story as they "accompanied the filmmaker." During the screening, children described the course of events and actively anticipated outcomes; they were fully involved and attentive. When the film ended, hands flew up and soon the lists on the blackboards were filled.

visual images	sounds/feelings	action words
headless man	choo, choo, choo	passing
people shadows	dizzy, nauseous	slowly moving
Chinese windows	bump, bump, bump	holding
colorful cars	jungle noises	relaxing
old man	whoo, whoo	sleeping
derby parachute	chug, chug	crying
blurry houses	whop, whop	draining
white bird	meow, meow	stealing
old train		bothered
		chirping
		squeaky

The Sweet Sound of Poetry

With intense pride, everyone read the words on the blackboard--words which were inspired by the two films. Next, I said I wanted them to combine two phrases from the categories on the blackboard in order to compose one line for their group poem. I recommended that children play with the phrases first to discover which ones worked best together. If they wanted to, they could use paper and pencils to experiment with their lines. Within moments, lines of poetry emerged. As children told me their lines, I wrote them on unused sections of the blackboard (although newsprint would also work for this). Some disagreement about particular lines did arise, but we settled all such issues by means of a consensus vote. In all, the poem was comprised of nine lines:

White bird chirping
Choo, choo, old train
Sleeping headless man
Slowly moving, dizzy, nauseous
Colorful cars, whish, whish
Blurry houses, squeaking
Stealing people, shadows
Chinese windows passing
Crying jungle noises.

I read it to the class and asked if anyone had any suggestions for changes, omissions, or additions. A brief discussion indicated that the children were satisfied with it as it was. So was I--although we could have continued this poetry writing activity if there had been more time.

In retrospect, I regard this screening as the most exciting session (out of all eight) that I had with that fourth grade. The children operated with freedom and real enthusiasm, dispelling my doubts that a language activity would be threatening and reinforcing my belief that, given a proper structure, stimulating films could work to inspire children's self-expression.

filmography

Note: All films are in color unless b&w is indicated.

FELIX GETS THE CAN by Pat Sullivan & Otto Messmer/1926 (7 minutes/animation/b&w/nonverbal)
Distributed by the Museum of Modern Art, NYC

GOD IS DOG SPELLED BACKWARDS by Dan McLaughlin/1967 (4 minutes/kinestatic animation/nonverbal)
Distributed by Creative Film Society, Reseda CA

KALEIDOFORM by Howard Danelowitz/1973
(4 minutes/animation/nonverbal)
Distributed by Picture Start, Champaign IL

MUDFLAT by Rick Reynolds/1979
(28 minutes/liveaction/narration)
Distributed by Reynolds, 3503 Lakeshore, Oakland CA

MURATTI MARCHES ON by Oskar Fischinger/1934
(4 minutes/object animation/nonverbal)
Distributed by Creative Film Society, Reseda CA

OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER by Carol & Ross Lowell/1979
(14 minutes/liveaction/dialogue & narration)
Distributed by Pyramid Films, Santa Monica CA

PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY by Eliot Noyes, Jr/1976
(1 minute/stop-motion liveaction/nonverbal)
Distributed by Unifilm, NYC

SKY DANCE: REACHING FOR LIFE IN THE COSMOS by Faith Hubley/1979 (11 minutes/animation/nonverbal)
Distributed by Pyramid Films, Santa Monica CA

TRANSFER by Eric Durst/1978
(10 minutes/animation/nonverbal in effect)
Distributed by Durst, 1777 First Avenue, NYC 10028

THE WONDER RING by Stan Brakhage/1955
(4 minutes/liveaction/silent)
Distributed by the Museum of Modern Art, NYC

with courage and dignity:

films about people with handicaps

by salvatore parlato

Ours, you have probably heard, is an era without heroes. Gone, supposedly, are those lofty models of yesteryear's newspapers or history books: the John F. Kennedys and Eleanor Roosevelts of politics, the Dempseys and DiMaggios of sports, the Marian Andersons and Fred Astaires of the performing arts. Perhaps we have been looking in the wrong areas, though, because we still have heroes--more, in fact, than ever. It's just that they differ from our earlier ideas about the great and the near-great. Some of our heroes are around us every day. They are our handicapped neighbors who daily demonstrate courage in the face of sometimes cruel, sometimes thoughtless barriers to their individuality and independence.

Some of us are not lucky enough to know these heroes personally and to benefit from the inspiration of their lives. That is where film comes in. Film, with its unique ability to reflect reality, can vicariously introduce us to a host of handicapped heroes we would otherwise never be able to meet. And, with its focus on actuality, liveaction portraits in film remove subjects from the realm of abstraction and humanize their lives for viewers.

Common to the sixteen films that follow is, not the disability, but the ability of the people portrayed. Their accomplishments are so diverse that viewers are bound to come away with a new appreciation for their handicapped peers, encouraging us all to raise our sights--and our sensitivity--regarding their counterparts whom we chance to meet.

Whatever your approach and whatever your selection, try to preview these films to be sure they are right for your objectives and the age of your viewers. Renta' or purchase information is available from the distributors listed. But first, check locally for free or low cost loans from your public library, school or college media center, or health department film service.

1981 is the International Year of Disabled Persons. Through films and increased contact with the handicapped you can make <u>every</u> year an IYDP!

ACROSS THE SILENCE BARRIER by WGBH-TV (1977/USA)
57 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Time-Life Video, NYC

This production from the "Nova" television series surveys the world of a million deaf Americans, highlighting some of their contemporary accomplishments. Among the memorable personalities introduced are speed-racer Kitty O'Neil and Professor Frances Parsons. It also compares the differences between lip-reading and sign language within the school environment.

ALL THE WAY UP THERE by Valhalla Films (1980/New Zealand)
27 minuted, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation, Chicago IL

Bruce Burgess, a twenty-four year old cerebral palsy victim, is happier than most of us: he has realized his impossible dream. With the help of Graeme Dingle, one of New Zealand's best mountaineers, Bruce conquers Mt. Ruapehu. Their dual effort provides a strong statement about individual abilities and achieving mutual goals. Their cooperation and friendship are as powerful as their determination...a symbol of the triumphs that are possible when hands are joined.

BLIND TEACHER by Henry Felt (1976/USA)
23½ minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by International Film Bureau, Chicago IL

This film shows how one blind man carries out his daily responsibilities as a full time teacher of seventh grade English. David Ticchi, legally blind since birth, is seen performing tasks required of a normal classroom teacher. Interviews with Mr. Ticchi, his colleagues, students, and principal explain his teaching methods and explore the peculiar advantages a blind teacher may bring to a sighted classroom.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF BONNIE CONSOLO
by Barry Spinello (1975/USA)
16minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Barr Films, Pasadena CA

This film shows the typical activities of a woman, born without arms, whose facile use of her legs allows her to drive an auto, cook, garden, and care for a house and family. Bonnie is matter-of-fact about her accomplishments--in itself this is an encouragement to any one similarly afflicted.

GRAVITY IS MY ENEMY by John Joseph (1977/USA)
26 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Churchill Films, Los Angeles CA

Mark Kicks, a twenty-seven year old quadriplegic artist, prepares for his San Francisco one-person show. While getting ready, he recalls his fall from a tree as a twelve-year-old, demonstrates his mouth-held drawing tools, and talks about his upbringing, schooling, and the probability of a premature death. Throughout the film, the principal subject is art, the process of creation, and the artist as a person.

I'LL FIND A WAY by Beverly Shaffer. (1977/Canada)
26 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Media Guild, Solana Beach CA

Nadia De Franco describes herself as an ordinary person but most observers wouldn't agree. She was born with spina bifida (malformation of the spine) and, besides regular physiotherapy, needs a brace and crutches to walk. Nadia introduces her friends, family, and some classmates who are multiply-handicapped. She projects such warmth and self-confidence that viewers are bound to give new meaning to the word 'disabled'. Typical of Nadia's attitude is her closing remark. When asked what she would do if other children made fun of her, she answered, "I don't know how I'll deal with them, but I'll find a way."

JAMES IS OUR BROTHER by BBC-TV. (1979/GB)
22 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Time-Life Video, NYC

A television documentary about a sixteen-year-old mongoloid who is about to graduate from remedial school. Even with his school's training and his parents' encouragement, it is a monumental task for James to do something as seemingly easy as taking a bus. Perhaps the most touching part of this film is James' answers to the questions: What is it like to be retarded? How do you feel about your life? How do strangers treat you?

KATHY by Mike Collins (1981/USA)
27 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Film Ideas, Deerfield IL

Because she was born with osteogenisis, Kathy's doctors held out little hope for her survival. But at eighteen, she has long out lived their prognostications. Although she weighs thirty-five pounds and is confined to a wheelchair, Kathy recently graduated from high school. This film is a tribute to her determination and a contradiction of popular attitudes toward those with multiple handicaps.

LEO BEUERMAN by Gene Boomer (1969/USA)
13 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration
Distributed by Centron Educational Films, Lawrence KS

This is the prototype film for raising consciousness about the abilities of handicapped people. Leo is multiply-afflicted with near-blindness, hearing impairment, and dwarfism. Yet, all by himself, he leads an independent and productive life in the mainstream of his environment. Although Leo died recently, he continues to be an inspiration through this film.

MIMI by Frank Moynihan (1972/USA)
13 minutes, Liveaction, Black & White, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Billy Budd Films, NYC

She is a beautiful young woman, but her body is permanently consigned to a wheelchair; her mind, however, is not confined. Mimi comments frankly on stereotypes, architechtural barriers, and the need for respect instead of pity. She maintains--as only an "insider" can-- that the way to survive a handicap is to resist what society would have you become.

MY SON KEVIN by Allan Segal (1970/GB)
24 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Wombat Productions, Ossining NY

Despite the cruel malformations caused by thalidomide, eleven-year-old Kevin Donnellon has a buoyant personality and outlook. Realistically balancing his optimism, Kevin's mother explains why the future holds many fears for her and her son.

PINS AND NEEDLES by Genni and Kim Batterham (1980/Australia) 37 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Filmmakers Library, NYC

What happens when disability strikes in the prime of life? When this happened to Genni Batterham, an Australian media student, she made this film about her multiple sclerosis. She focuses particular attention on her marriage, self-esteem, dependence, occupational workshops, and the problems of wheelchair access.

REACHING by Michael Maltby (1976/Canada)
5½ minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Rehabfilm Library, NYC

Chris Stoddard, despite his spina bifida, has a brown belt in karate, wrestles, swims, and holds a world wheelchair record for track and field. Vocationally, he is an investigator for Bell Telephone of Canada, sponsor of this production. Chris addresses the problems of prejudice, while suggesting ways of overcoming it.

REGINA: A GIFT OF VISION by Larry Klingman (1979/USA)
8 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue.
Distributed by Little Red Filmhouse, Los Angeles CA

Regina, an eleven-year-old, practices piano while occasionally touching the music printed in Braille. Then, as she does her shopping and other daily activities Regina describes her life in a sighted society. This film is designed to raise awareness and to help young people to understand handicapped children.

SURVIVAL RUN by Joaquin Padro (1980/USA)
12 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Magus Films, San Francisco CA

Harry Cordellos, totally blind since nineteen, competes in the most rugged marathon race in America, guided over the treacherous course by a sighted partner. The symbolism is appropriate and exciting, and the two of them conquer every challenge along the grueling mountain path.

WHO ARE THE DEBOLTS? by John Korty (1978/USA)
72 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Pyramid Films, Santa Monica CA

This is the longest film in this selection but its length is necessary for embracing the scope of the story about a couple that adopts nineteen children of various disabilities and ethnic roots: Korean and Vietnamese war orphans; paralyzed, sightless, limbless. Far from depressing, this rare family circle is upbeat and fun-loving--an example of the importance of parent and sibling support.

taking matters into your own hands

two books about making media

by margo cornelius

Doing the Media and Video in the Classroom, two recently published books about media education, are, in my opinion, essential reference tools for teachers, administrators, parents, or librarians--anyone involved in the communication of ideas and information within educational settings. They also provide much needed information for successfully incorporating media education into the classroom including rationales for media education programs, activities for media production and media study, and its application to a variety of curriculum areas.

The books do not belabor the obvious, that our media-oriented, technological society is here to stay; they take off from that point, developing the theme that media literacy is profoundly necessary to our future. John Culkin, a pioneer in media education, makes the point quite succinctly in Doing the Media: "It has always made good sense for people who live on water to learn how to swim." Swimming in the electronic, technological ocean means recognizing media's importance, understanding it, and gaining control over it. In Video in the Classroom, Don Kaplan addresses our current state of understanding: "Less information is available on transforming...criticisms [about popular television] into actions..,"he says,"The critical focus has been on looking at, not doing television. Since mass media involve a flow of information in one direction only, the emphasis needs to be shifted from idle receivers to informed transmitters."

Doing the Media evolved out of the Center for Understanding Media (one of the first media education graduate institutes for teachers in this country), and is a compilation of articles written by eighteen teachers who work directly with children. The fine introductory articles by John Culkin, Kit Laybourne, and Robert Geller describe the state of media education and its rationale; this is followed by sections on photography, video, film, sound and other media formats. Within each section there are articles on pupil-created media activities as well as media study activities. Activities for making photographs and using cameras are followed, for example, by activities for studying the history of photography and incorporating this medium into anthropology, history, art and other curricula. This edition of Doing the Media is a revised and up-dated version of the 1972 publication and it contains much new material. A section on sound, that much ignored medium, provides many suggestions for exploring our acoustic environment. The new resources section is an invaluable guide to reference books, periodicals, films, and organizations involved in media education; it also includes a list of hardware and software distributors. The gentle, nurturing tone of Doing the Media says that teaching media is an enjoyable necessity; the book would be a great asset to both troopers and novices alike.

Video in the Classroom starts off by demystifying video. It explains how video works and presents techniques for teaching video. Many ideas for video programs, games, special effects, art,graphics and television study are presented. Especially interesting are many suggestions for integrating video production into a variety of curriculum areas. One example is demonstrating the tongue and lip movements of a foreign language in close-up video.

Television and video have become integral parts of the educational process, yet, although most schools have at least some video equipment, teachers have not given serious consideration to pupil-created video and how it can stimulate interest in and reinforcement for learning in many areas. "Language skills, research, organization, writing, speaking, listening, art, music, and interpersonal skills necessary to complete a videotape," says Kaplan,"contribute to students' social, emotional and academic learning."

Since the field of media education is relatively new, there isn't a great wealth of reference materials for teachers. Both books are excellent starting points for launching a media education program; they are extremely well-written and broad in scope, including comprehensive bibliographies, indices and glossaries. Of the two, Video in the Classroom is more limited since it focuses only on video, but both books convincingly propound the need for media education and its inclusion in the total educational process. The books' strong and clearly written rationales for this can serve as reference material for writing proposals and for presenting ideas to school boards, supervisors, parents and colleagues.

One striking aspect of both Doing the Media and Video in the Classroom is how many of the suggested activities do not require any hardware at all and are applicable to a wide variety of curriculum areas and student populations--foreign-born, gifted, slow learners, children and adults alike. Media, these books emphasize, are not separate and distinct areas to be studied, but are, rather, fundamental tools of learning.

These books are terrific starting points, but additional material is sorely needed since no body of reference material for teachers of any discipline is complete without a discussion of the problems relating to teaching and the strategies for coping with those problems. When I taught video, all the children wanted to use the camera at once, and they insulted each other cruelly when they saw each others'images on the video monitor. I could have used some helpful hints about what to do when faced with problems such as these. I would also like to see discussions about how children feel about media education--does it clear up (or add to) their confusion about the world? I would also like other material which focuses on one medium intensively (such as Video in the Classroom) along with material which outlines how to incorporate media into specific discipline areas--film study in the English curriculum, for example. While my comments are not meant to criticize the books under review here--they more than successfully accomplish their goals--it is a plea for more information.

I strongly recommend Doing the Media (212 pp.) and Video in the Classroom (161 pp.), both in 8½" x 11" format, for inclusion in education libraries. Robert Geller and Kit Laybourne sum it up in Doing the Media: "As times change so should basic skills. Understanding media is a twentieth century tool for survival." (p. 7) These books provide educators with access to that tool.

Doing the Media (NYC: McGraw-Hill, 1978)

Video in the Classroom (White Plains NY: Knowledge Industry Publications, 1980)

ex libris:

transforming literature into film

by maureen gaffney

During the course of a given year, my staff and I get numerous requests for recommendations of films which have been adapted from literature. In order to simplify our response to such requests, we have compiled a list of films, published below, which we wholeheartedly recommend as both good films and fine adaptations of literature or folktales.

In keeping with our evaluation guidelines, all the works listed are 16mm shorts, and all were successfully tested with children.

Film Adaptations of Literature

THE CASE OF THE ELEVATOR DUCK
by Joan Micklin Silver (1974/USA)
17 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Learning Corporation of America, NYC
Based on the book by Polly Berrien Berends (Dell, 1973).

PIERRE by Maurice Sendak (1976/USA)
6 minutes, Line animation, Color, Song
Distributed by Weston Woods Studios, Weston CT
Based on the book by Maurice Sendak
(Harper & Row, 1962).

THE STREET by Caroline Leaf (1976/Canada)
10 minutes, Paint animation, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by National Film Board of Canada, NYC
Based on the book by Mordecai Richler
(McClelland & Stewart, 1969).

THE WHITE HERON by Jane Morrison (1978/USA)
26 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Learning Corporation of America, NYC
Based on the story, "A White Heron,"
by Sarah Orne Jewett from the book,
In the Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories
(Doubleday, 1956).

Film Adaptations of Folktales

ANANSI THE SPIDER by Gerald McDermott (1969/USA)
10 minutes, Cel animation, Color, Narration
Distributed by Texture Films, New York NY
Developed with the book by Gerald McDermott from
the Ashanti folktale.

ARROW TO THE SUN by Gerald McDermott (1973/USA)
12 minutes, Cel Animation, Color, Minimal dialogue
Distributed by Texture Films, New York NY
Developed with the book by Gerald McDermott from
the Pueblo folktale.

THE FROG KING OR FAITHFUL HENRY
by Tom Davenport (1980/USA)
15 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Davenport Films, Delaplane VA
An American adaptation of the tale from the
collection of the Brothers Grimm.

HANSEL AND GRETEL, AN APPALACHIAN VERSION
by Tom Davenport (1975/USA)
17 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Davenport Films, Delaplane VA
An American adaptation of the tale from the
collection of the Brothers Grimm.

KUUMBA: SIMON'S NEW SOUND
by Bob Bloomberg & Jane Aaron (1978/USA)
8 minutes, Cutout animation, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Beacon Films, Norwood MA
Based on an origins tale from Trinidad.

LUMAAQ: AN ESKIMO LEGEND
by Co Hoedeman (1975/Canada)
7 minutes, Cutout animation, Black and White,
Inuktituk dialogue
Distributed by National Film Board of Canada, NYC
Based on an Eskimo tale translated directly from the
oral tradition and told in native dialect.

THE OWL AND THE LEMMING
by Co Hoedeman (1973/Canada)
7 minutes, Puppet animation, Color, Narration
Distributed by AIMS Instructional Media, Glendale CA
Based on an Eskimo folktale.

THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE
by Caroline Leaf (1976/Canada)
8 minutes, Sand animation, Monocolor, Inuit dialogue
Distributed by Churchill Films, Los Angeles CA
Based on an Eskimo folktale and told by native
storytellers direct from the oral tradition.

RAPUNZEL, RAPUNZEL by Tom Davenport (1978/USA)
15 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration & Dialogue
Distributed by Davenport Films, Delaplane VA
An American adaptation of the tale from the
collection of the Brothers Grimm.

THE STONECUTTER by Gerald McDermott (1965/USA)
6 minutes, Cel animation, Color, Narration
Distributed by Weston Woods Studios, Weston CT
Developed with the book by Gerald McDermott from
the Japanese folktale.

SUN FLIGHT by Gerald McDermott (1966/USA)
6 minutes, Cel animation, Color, Nonverbal
Distributed by McDermott Films, New Milford CT
A dance-like adaptation of the legend of Daedelus and Icarus. A companion book is in preparation.

TALEB AND HIS LAMB by Ami Amitai (1975/USA)
16 minutes, Liveaction, Color,
English narration & Beduin dialogue
Distributed by Barr Films, Pasadena CA
Based on a Beduin folktale.

THREE STONE BLADES
by Orville & Dorothy Goldner (1971/USA)
16 minutes, Liveaction, Color, Narration
Distributed by International Film Bureau, Chicago IL
Based on an Eskimo folktale.

WHAZZAT? by Arthur Pierson, Jr. (1976/USA)
10 minutes, Clay animation, Color, Nonverbal
Distributed by Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago IL
Based on the East Indian tale of "The Six Blind Men and the Elephant."

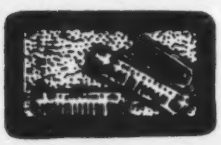
Feature-length Film Adaptations of Literature

Not surprisingly, we also get many requests for information about feature-length films. For a number of reasons, the Media Center for Children does not evaluate long works: first, it is nearly impossible to preview any of them; second, we can only do so much and there seems to be such a vacuum of information about short films for children that we are concentrating on that length film; and third, long works demand more classroom time than we can get for our film evaluations (which are conducted primarily in schools because that is where children are most of the time during the week).

These requests are coming with increasing frequency at a time when, unfortunately, many periodicals which used to review feature-length films for children and adolescents have either dropped that service or have gone out of business entirely. Media and Methods and the Film and Broadcasting Review have ceased publication. Parents Magazine used to print extensive reviews but stopped doing so just this year. Readers might try to locate back issues for reviews of recent films; better yet, write to the editors and urge them to resume their review service.

Despite the vacuum created by the loss of these periodicals, there is help available in the form of three recently published books, Movies for Kids, The Screen Image of Youth and Films Ex Libris. While none of the books gives readers specific information about how children responded to the films recommended in them -- something we would very much have liked to know, they are, nonetheless, extremely helpful resources for those looking for literary adaptations.

There is also a slight overlap among the books, but each book is sufficiently distinct in both approach and analysis of the works it describes, that we recommend all three.

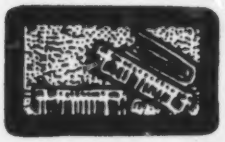


Movies for Kids: A Guide for Parents and Teachers on the Entertainment Film for Children by Ruth M. Goldstein and Edith Zornow. (New York NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1980)

This update and expansion of the authors' 1973 programming resource contains many works which were adapted from literature -- as well as many non-literary films. Among the literary adaptations are the following works:

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBINSON CRUSOE, THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER, AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS, BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, BLACK BEAUTY, THE BLACK STALLION, CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS, CHARLOTTE'S WEB, THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO, DAVID COPPERFIELD, DON QUIXOTE, DRACULA, FRANKENSTEIN, GONE WITH THE WIND, THE GOOD EARTH, GREAT EXPECTATIONS, HEIDI, HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY, THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY, THE INVISIBLE MAN, ISLAND OF THE BLUE DOLPHINS, IVANHOE, JANE EYRE, KIM, KING SOLOMON'S MINES, LILIES OF THE FIELDS, LITTLE WOMEN, LOST HORIZON, MACBETH, MARY POPPINS, MOBY DICK, MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY, MY SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN, OLD YELLER, OLIVER TWIST, PINOCCHIO, PIPPI LONGSTOCKING, PLANET OF THE APES, THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE, THE RAILWAY CHILDREN, THE RED PONY, RING OF BRIGHT WATER, ROMEO AND JULIET, SHANE, SOUNDER, STORM BOY, SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON, A TALE OF TWO CITIES, THINGS TO COME, THE TIME MACHINE, TREASURE ISLAND, 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA, THE WIZARD OF OZ, WUTHERING HEIGHTS, and THE YEARLING.

The brief annotations which describe the films include running times, distribution information, and comments about the films' style. The authors presume that their readers are familiar with the books on which the films are based.



The Screen Image of Youth: Movies About Children and Adolescents by Ruth M. Goldstein and Edith Zornow. (Metuchen NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1980)

A very helpful supplement to Movies for Kids -- perhaps a necessary supplement,-- and an unbeatable resource. While The Screen Image of Youth annotates some of the same titles as Movies for Kids, it does so from a different perspective, one that could greatly benefit librarians, programmers, and educators alike.

Among the feature films adapted from literature which are discussed in the book are the following works:

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, ALL THE WAY HOME, THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE, BLESS THE BEASTS AND CHILDREN, DAVID AND LISA, THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, A DOG OF FLANDERS, A HERO AIN'T NUTHIN BUT A SANDWICH, IN THIS HOUSE OF BREDE, A KID FOR TWO FARTHINGS, THE LAST PICTURE SHOW, LORD OF THE FLIES, THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING, MY FRIEND FLICKA, NATIONAL VELVET, RED SKY AT MORNING, TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, and WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND.

This fine resource is divided into thematic/subject categories such as Growing Pains, Finding Oneself, Family Relationships, Generation Conflicts, Love and Sex, Religion, and [Adaptations] From Literature. Annotations are lengthy, pro-youth, and include running times and distribution information.

Films Ex Libris: Literature in 16mm and Video by Salvatore J. Parlato, Jr. (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 1980)

An eclectic selection of films and videotapes which have been adapted from or are based on literature, this book seems most clearly designed for the classroom and many of the novel adaptations are merely excerpts from feature-length films.

The divisions by literary category are helpful (divisions such as the Bible, Biography, Children's Stories, Drama, Fables/Fairy Tales/Folktales, Nonfiction, Novels, Poetry, and Short Stories), but the author is apparently more interested in the source than in how well these "translations" work as media.

Included among the novels are several young adult works (HOME TO STAY from Grandpa and Frank; ME AND DAD'S NEW WIFE from A Smart Kid Like You; and ROOKIE OF THE YEAR from Not Bad for a Girl) as well as the all-ages television production, ROOTS. The short story section includes some classics: BERNICE BOBS HER HAIR, BROWN WOLF, THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER, THE GARDEN PARTY, AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE, and THE TELL-TALE HEART.

The brief annotations assume familiarity with the book sources; they include running time and distribution information. (McFarland is a new publisher; their phone number is 919/246-4460.)

A still from FRIENDS

precious few, continued

have ever seen. The story is intriguing, challenging, and cleverly unresolved. Shelley and Tom are building a hideout in the woods. When they run out of boards, Shelley rummages in her garage then scouts around the neighborhood for more. The man next door refuses to give her the boards she spies in his driveway because he just bought them to build shelves.

When Shelley and Tom return empty-handed to the hideout, they discover a younger boy playing there who asks to help. Shelley agrees he can, but Tom won't let him stay unless he finds boards so they can keep building. To their surprise, the little boy returns dragging the boards Shelley recognizes as her neighbor's. She insists they be returned. Tom disagrees, arguing that even if the theft is discovered, the little boy might not be blamed because he had no idea the boards were valuble.

Confused, Shelley gets snarled in the deception when she lies to her mother, saying she has no idea where the neighbor's missing boards are. The film ends as we share Shelley's acute discomfort over what she's done and what to do next.

THE HIDEOUT leaves plenty of room for young viewers to grapple with issues that no doubt hit very close to home. Well-shot and simply written (it hardly sounded scripted), it offers fine performances from the children. The film is beautifully directed, with a quiet but compelling energy that springs from real dilemmas.

An extremely fine example of the values clarification genre, THE HIDEOUT could very well be used in a broader film program without specific follow-up discussion. And it is remarkable for other reasons. It shows girls and boys playing together without taking any note of that fact. The children share their project on entirely equal footing; their roles and points of view are assigned without any regard to sex. Shelley is a girl who must be described with action verbs: she searches, she asks, she hammers, she argues. She can say "no," refusing to finish the hideout until she decides what to do about the stolen boards. She's a bit kinder to the younger boy; she worries and thinks; but these are strengths, not weaknesses. The fact that she confronts issues and accepts responsibility for actions is not a goody-two-shoes sidestep but a stance. Shelley is the girl we always wanted to see on film: sturdy, active, resourceful--with a brain and muscles, as well as a heart and a conscience.

OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER by Carol and Ross Lowell (reviewed in this issue) revolves around six-year-old Josh's attempts to convince his younger brother Evan to kiss him and say "I love you." Now that Evan is two, he thinks he's too old for that kind of stuff. He airily wipes Josh's kiss and request away.

But the subject of the film is far larger than its ostensible story. It's not about a kiss--it's about two brothers' attempts to deal with their complicated relationships to each other and their parents; about their rage and rivalry; their toughness and tenderness; their drives to share, compare and compete. The boys play out their intense, familiar drama in a wholly non-sexist context, unhindered by old baggage of sex-role stereotypes. Josh isn't afraid to show tenderness or to talk about love; to request or receive affection. And Evan doesn't refuse to kiss Josh because he's learned that "boys don't do that." It's because he's confused about how to express love now that he's no longer a baby; about whether he can love and hate the same person; about how many people he can love at the same time; and also because he's two, and two-year-olds want to say "no" as often as they can.

"Tell me you love me," Josh says. "I love your eyes," Evan answers; then, "I love Mommy." When Josh protests, "But you can love more than one person," one senses that he, like Evan, is trying to untangle exactly the same loveknots on a slightly more sophisticated level.

Evan eventually answers Josh's request--on his own terms, in his own sweet time. Late one night, when Josh is already fast asleep, Evan kisses his rubber dolly, then his bottle--then creeps out of bed to kiss his big brother very quietly on the cheek.

But for me, the real climax appears much earlier. I think if big brother were watching more closely he'd find another more outrageous, but more authentic testament of brotherly love. In a moment that says more abut love than the quick-and-easy symbol of a kiss, Evan plunges into the warm bubbles of Josh's bath...still wearing his fuzzy blue Dr. Denton's. What greater love hath a little boy than to follow his brother into a bathtub? I view Evan's plunge as a delicious and entirely appropriate expression of two-year-old love. Some kids--and many adults--may not. But what a wonderful catalyst for debate among child viewers about entirely personal expressions of love--the ones they'd choose; ones they feel have more meaning than the stock-in-trade peck on the cheek, or the store-bought gift or card.

OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER works so well because of its high reality index. The boys wear their hostilities as well as their hearts on their sleeves. Josh envies the attention and affection Evan attracts from their parents; he shows regret for the greater allowances given the younger child; and despite the thrill of his growing competence, he casts a wistful glance as Evan chatters gaily to himself, completely submerged in the simpler fantasies of two-year-old play. ("This used to be my doll, but Evan takes care of her now.") Evan often finds pain in comparisons: he's jealous of Josh's superior strengths, skills, privileges; of his apparent 'first place' in the family. He's already launched on a race to catch up that he'll never win.

OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER is a skillfully-made documentary with a completely respectful attitude toward its subjects and its subject. Passions and complexities are explored simply but never simplistically--always in language and action that children will understand immediately. One senses that writers/parents/filmmakers Carol and Ross Lowell--who even give their sons a well-deserved "interpreted by" credit--made sure they had the luxury of shooting and reshooting reenactments of actual family vignettes until they worked almost perfectly. The film is surprisingly glossy--sometimes nearly too pretty--but it works. Children will have no trouble tuning in, taking and switching sides in conflicts that no doubt echo their own.

TALEB AND HIS LAMB by Ami Amitai is set in a culture as alien as the Lowells' is familiar. Taleb is a Beduin boy who lives in the Negev, where life's hard realities demand discipline and an iron will. Life goes on as it has for time out of mind. Taleb's father, Hassan, is a shepherd; tending sheep "is boy's work." But Taleb breaks the rules. In a harsh land where animals are not pets or playthings but a means of survival, he falls in love with a chocolate-and-vanilla colored lamb even though he knows it is being raised for slaughter.

When the inevitable market day arrives, Taleb's father refuses to spare the lamb he must sell to help feed the family. But Taleb's will is being tempered, too; it is nearly as iron as his father's. He steals the lamb and runs away into the desert. Boy and lamb survive four scorching days and chilly nights before Hassan finds them. "Forgive me, father," Taleb asks with dignity. "I only wanted to save my lamb."

A still from OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER

The tale offers two endings. In one, Hassan answers sternly, "I forgive you, for you were brave. But you did steal the lamb so you must be taught a lesson." The lamb is sold. In the other, Hassan looks into his son's heart and sees his courage; he spares the lamb so it can grow into a ram for Taleb's own flock.

Though rooted in an ultimately traditional culture where to challenge sex-roles literally might be to court disaster, this tale is peculiarly non-sexist--and likely to have even more liberating resonances for Western children than for its possible Beduin audience. It presents as hero a boy who follows his heart instead of his head; who defies not only his father but his whole culture as he begins to define his own values and take his first steps toward adulthood; a boy more concerned with love and tenderness--with nurturing his lamb--than in the money or goods it can bring. Rather than dismissing this merely as the idealism of a child, at least one version of the story treats his act as the beginning of manhood--suggesting that toughness and tenderness might serve a shepherd, or any man, quite well. "The way this tale ends is for you to decide--for true wisdom is born of hard but just decisions." All the sons and daughters watching are challenged to reach their own conclusions about which kind of man they hope Taleb will grow up to be.

Taleb's courage is all the more remarkable given his milieu. Last year in the Middle East, I saw little Beduin boys like Taleb--boys with great dark eyes, bad teeth, and dusty stick-legs clinging behind their fathers and grandfathers on camelback. I saw the Beduin campfires shining like single stars in the vast, black desert night; glimpsed silhouettes gathered before the flames; imagined they might be retelling Taleb's tale. And I saw the strictly separate assignment of male and female roles suggested in the film (Hassan tends his herds and his business; his wife tends the home and children). Some people might worry about screening a film which depicts traditional sexist images and attitudes (Hassan dismisses his wife scornfully--"I don't need your advice, woman."--when she pleads on Taleb's behalf). But rejecting the film on these grounds is like looking the proverbial gift horse in the mouth. Instead of reinforcing old ideas, the entire film raises questions about how far an individual should follow cultural norms s/he finds distressing. If Taleb follows his heart now, who knows what other norms he might grow up to defy, or what personal rules he'll forge about how to treat his own wife?

To reject the film because of these factors would be a great loss, particularly in view of its other riches. TALEB AND HIS LAMB is one of the finest children's films I've ever seen. It is tersely shot, edited and narrated; it is challenging, yet simple. There is not an extra word spoken in a spare, utterly graceful script. Music, faces, each detail is foreign and exotic--and completely accessible. The filmmaker allows children penetrating glimpses of an entirely different way of life without explaining everything away; even the snippets of Beduin language are somehow understood, spoken within contexts and with action so clear that translation would be superfluous.

Promises But Little Else:

You've probably noticed by now that most of the films I am describing are about boys. Most childrn's films are. And while these films may be part of the solution, they also illustrate the problem: Where are the girls? Making my list brought the facts into very sharp focus: We need more strong, excellent films about girls... humanistic films about boys who don't have to dare to be gentle; about girls who are naturally and unself-consciously daring; films that emphasize our common human ground and work for both boys and girls.

ONCE UPON A CHOICE, a new film by Liane Brandon, might have helped fill the gap. It offers a much-needed parable illustrating how important it is for girls to find out what the world is about before they rush into marriage or choose someone just because they've been chosen. A brand-new fairytale set back in once-upon-a-time, this is an overtly feminist film with some laudable, even wonderful messages: The story tells us in no uncertain terms that a girl need not marry just because it's expected. Instead, she can give herself a year and a day to go out into the world and seek her own fortune.

Princess Frances--raised to be proper, pleasant, and pleasantly proper--follows the instructions of the Queen and King to "choose wisely and carefully as you can" when selecting her mate and the next ruler of her kingdom. In short order, she rejects Prince Premium of Upper Fiduciary--a "fine figure of a man"--after he takes offense when she very graciously notes a mistake in his math calculations. She finds Prince Gauntlet of Skirmish-Upon-Avon, a jousting jock locked in brand-new armor, "an alarming kind of charming" whose perspective is limited to the thin slot in his visor. And while she temporarily finds the unctuous, vainglorious Prince Rapport of Outer Begonia "a disarming kind of charming," he agrees with everything she says. Not very interesting. "Kind of like an echo," she observes with disappointment. Obviously, Princess Frances does herself and her kingdom a big favor when she rides off on her bike to see the world.

ONCE UPON A CLASSIC delivers loads of messages. And very little else. It is not a good film, and it is not a good film for children. The acting is bad; the lighting is terrible--full of shadows and garish color. It looks as if more time and money got spent on costumes than on any other detail of the production. The language is studded--nay, thick--with puns. Too many, especially for children. The princess--who must have been a beguiling character on paper--doesn't make it on 16mm. She flashes her dimples a lot; she borders so close to the too-sweet category that only her delicious eccentricities (she prefers black olives to maraschino cherries for garnishing her desserts) restrained me from reaching out to throttle her. The knights are nightmares--cardboard caricatures that tease the mind and fail to engage the heart. One hardly expects characters of subtlety and fine shading in a parable, but it's a mistake to resort to parody if you're trying to evoke discussion and exploration instead of a laugh at someone's expense.

And this leads to the gravest flaw, at the very place where the heart of the film should be. ONCE UPON A CLASSIC aims its message at girls-and-women only, leaving boys out except as a source of ridicule. This isn't non-sexist; it's self-defeating. Boys as well as girls will make choices about marriage--and females may want to grow up to marry liberated males who don't retreat behind macho masks. It's a shame this film offers so little to help boys dig into the facts, feelings and fantasies surrounding their ideas of marriage. Ridiculing males only puts boys in the audience on the defensive, and children will never have a heart-to-heart talk about love and marriage after watching the human race once again split along sexist lines.

Where Things Stand

There are slim pickings when it comes to excellent, humanistic films for children (and you can't have one without the other), but we're getting somewhere. The brave, sturdy girls who don't apologize for being clever or ambitious; the boys who don't even have to dare to be gentle or to show their feelings; children who are nice or nasty regardless of gender--they're beginning to appear when the lights go out and the projectors go on. But we need more of them: especially, though not exclusively, we need more humanistic films starring girls. We need girl protagonists who struggle, strive, stumble and survive. We need more films for children that show active, autonomous, achieving, ingenious females in positions of authority; films where conflict and achievment are rooted in character, not gender; films that recognize the difficulties that boys and men, girls and women, face in their struggle to be full human beings who will love and work.

filmography

All films are color.

FRIENDS by Pieter Van Deusen/1972
(18 minutes/liveaction)
Distributed by Churchill Films, Los Angeles CA

THE HIDEOUT by George McQuilkin/1974
(15 minutes/liveaction)
Distributed by Churchill Films, Los Angeles CA

HOPSCOTCH by Robert Churchill/1971
(12 minutes/liveaction)
Distributed by Churchill Films, Los Angeles CA

JEALOUSY: I WON'T BE YOUR FRIEND
Produced by Don Conner & Guidance Associates/1973
(13 minutes/liveaction)
Distributed by Coe Films, NYC

OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER by Carol & Ross Lowell/1979
(14 minutes/liveaction)
Distributed by Pyramid Films, Santa Monica CA

ONCE UPON A CLASSIC by Liane Brandon/1981
(15 minutes/liveaction fairytale)
Distributed by New Day Films, Franklin Lake NJ

TALEB AND HIS [illegible] by Ami Amitai/1975/Israel
(16 minutes/liveaction)
Distributed by Barr Films, Pasedena CA

[Editor's Note: In discussing the origins of the humanist movement in his book, Renaissance Thought (Harper & Row, 1961), Paul Oskar Kristeller explains that humanism was something of a "back-to-basics" movement. The basics, then, were grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy -- the study of which included the reading and interpretation of Latin and Greek classics.

Humanists believed in a liberal education, in its most general sense, and a characteristic feature of Renaissance humanism was "...the tendency to express and to consider worth expressing, the concrete uniqueness of one's feelings, opinions, [and] experiences...." After a careful study of the literature of the period, the only common philosophical doctrine Kristeller could find among humanists was "...a belief in the value of man and the humanities and in the revival of ancient learning."

In the centuries which followed, the term humanist took on additional and sometimes diverse meanings, but its contemporary usage, as defined in the 1963 Columbia Encyclopedia, focuses on "...lasting human values, cultivation of the classics, and respect for scientific knowledge." According to the 1968 College Edition of Webster's, a humanist is "...a student of human nature and human affairs." The first definition of humanist in the 1969 Random House Dictionary is, almost word for word, the same as that in Webster's; the second listing defines a humanist as "...a person with a strong interest in or concern for human welfare, values, and dignity."

In recent years there has emerged an American movement called "humanistic education" -- a movement which derives, in part, from the teachings and writings of Carl Rogers, Arthur Combs, and Gerald Weinstein. In their book, Humanistic Education Sourcebook (Prentice-Hall, 1975), editors Read and Simon explain that "humanistic education" is based on the premise that "...teaching is first and foremost a relationship between teacher and student which includes... human understandings that grow out of uniquely human experiences."

The common thread that runs through all these definitions of humanism, humanist, and humanistic is a respect for human dignity and moral values, a concern for the individual, and a willingness to look with an open mind at the present and the future, while treasuring past cultural achievements. It is in these broad and positive uses of the word that we chose the term humanistic to describe positive sex-role models in films for children.]

mcdermott, continued

There is a wonderful sense of progress from your first film, THE STONECUTTER, which is very dependent on words, to your most recent film, ARROW TO THE SUN, which is highly cinematic -- almost nonverbal -- and requires viewers to follow the images. What do you think happened in terms of the development of your style of animation?

I think I was able to close the gap between my imagination and what finally appeared on film. At the very start of my filmmaking endeavors, I established a curious working pattern, simply because of the circumstances under which I was producing. When I made that first film and had an opportunity to use that 35mm camera, I had one chance only. There was no time for testing. There was no possibility of retakes. Whatever came out had to be right. So, on my first film I spent a considerable amount of time imaging the film, frame by frame. I ran it over and over again in my mind before I ever put pencil to paper, because I had to tie down every single frame in order to take full advantage of the opportunity. That established a way of working. I would do a storyboard, but no pretesting.

During the intervening years, I came closer each time to imagining what was possible and rendering it on film. I think it has probably been good that there's been a hiatus since I made ARROW TO THE SUN, because at the time I made that film I was so thoroughly in control that my animation style was becoming less fluid than I wanted it to be. THE MAGIC TREE, despite its quirkiness, probably has the best balance of fluid motion, color, and design.

How do you develop each story idea?

I constantly read mythology and folklore, in original sources and in commentaries such as those by Joseph Campbell. When certain factors -- an interesting story, action and drama, and my own affinity for a particular culture or design form -- all come together, it signals a moment when I focus on a particular tale. Naturally, a story must meet certain criteria. It must have enough action to sustain a ten- or fifteen-minute span of time, but it can't be so complex that is has to be done in shorthand. Also, the story must have tremendous elements of fantasy, elements I can bring to life through animation on the screen.

Once I have selected a tale, the next step is to do some visual research. I have spent a great deal of time at the American Museum of Natural History and at other museums, such as the Brooklyn Museum, studying the folk art of

A still from ARROW TO THE SUN

various cultures. I also listen to representative music, to capture whatever system of symbols is inherent in the folk art. From this research, I create an equivalent system of my own. I try to capture the essence of color, form, and motion that I feel is appropriate for a given folktale.

How would you describe your animation technique? Is it collage?

No, I've never used collage. When I started filmmaking, I was aware that student films were always collage films. So, when I made THE STONECUTTER, I was determined that it would have a finish, an assurance of design that would remove it from the category of student-collage films.

To get the kind of flat textures and shapes I desired, I silkscreened all the images in THE STONECUTTER. I cut stencils and pulled prints on acetate cels for each position of the stonecutter, as well as for the background art -- the one exception being the magic marker clouds which, to this day, make me cringe every time I see them.

What is happening in terms of your filmmaking? You haven't made a film in several years and your themes, at least in your books, seem to be changing somewhat. Papagayo is about a mischief-making parrot.

Papagayo was a much needed bit of comic relief, for me, after a long series of projects that dealt with very serious themes. The Voyage of Osiris dealt with death. The Knight of the Lion, an Arthurian legend, is a tale of an extremely arduous journey, a falling away and a failure -- then a renewed effort to undertake the journey again. Sun Flight was a book version of my film about Icarus.

I really needed to do something that was funny and lighthearted. Papagayo emerged as the solution. There's a good possibility that I will make an animated film of the book. I would like to get back into film production.

One of my great disappointments is, that in twenty years of making films, I've only managed to commit six ideas to film. Six short films in twenty years! Certainly, I've done a lot of other work, and my time has been totally occupied with work as an artist, but for every film that was produced, half a dozen went unproduced.

Part of the reason for this is simply the vicissitudes of being a maker of short films, of trying to get the funds and get something into production. Part of the reason was my inability to delegate authority; my films were so intensely personal, that I felt compelled to do them all myself.

In addition, the economics of short films can be defeating. I would, in retrospect, gladly trade a few of the design courses I took in college for one good course in business administration.

Those discouragements, and the frustration of doing all the work myself, closed out film for me several years ago. I couldn't get my energies rolling. Now, however, things have changed -- I've even started to do some television work in Dallas.

Can you give me a rough idea of the proportion of time it takes to make a film, compared to a book, and the ratio of moneys earned between the two formats?

Color picture books take eight to ten months from conception to final artwork. Based on my past methods, films took roughly eighteen months from storyboard to final print. I might do fifteen color paintings for a book, while a film might require as many as 6,000 separate drawings. The earnings in no way reflect that increased time and effort; my film earnings are significantly lower than my book earnings.

I think this amazing imbalance has to do with the volume of sales involved. Books are much more accessible, and many more units are sold in comparison to short films; inevitably, more money is generated from book sales.

Also, a film is often the filmmaker's own investment; his or her own money finances the production. Whereas, in doing a book, the production money comes from the publisher. I hand the artwork to a publisher and the publisher does the typesetting, color reproductions, and the printing -- which is not inconsiderable. It costs $50,000 to put a first printing of 15,000 copies of a color picturebook into a warehouse. It would cost about $35,000 -- possibly more -- to put one of my animated films into a distributor's catalog with fifty preview prints available. Additional prints would be made as they were ordered.

You participated in an MCC seminar in June of 1980. At the time, you expressed strong feelings about television. What are your feelings now regarding children's television and art?

The quality of images (particularly in animation) used on most children's programs is banal. Why should children constantly be exposed to hackneyed and stereotyped images such as those in the Saturday morning cartoons?

Children's programs should draw upon the richest part of our culture! They do not, and I find this very upsetting. Although children may not know "the best" when they first see it, they will never appreciate good art if they never see any.

Such a point of view threatens and angers some people, particularly those who feel that art should be as broad-based as possible. I would prefer to offer children works of real quality, of mastery, rather than those that are easily accessible and easily forgettable -- like cartoons.

Viewed in the total spectrum of the visual arts, I turned for inspiration to a rather narrow band of artists -- masters such as Matisse and Klee -- and to those established movements in art that are associated with museums. I have tremendous respect for and belief in museums.

It interests me that you mention Matisse and Klee. They are both, in some respects, fairly accessible to children.

Yes, well... Matisse is one of my favorites. And Klee was drawn to folk and traditional arts. Like children's art, folk art possesses qualities of symbolic, direct, and uncluttered expression.

Claudine Brown, from the education department at the Brooklyn Museum, uses your film, ARROW TO THE SUN, to help children learn to identify and appreciate the symbol systems of different cultures, artifacts from which are in the museum's collection. Although this may be an unfair question, what else do you think your films can teach?

Self-reliance, courage, and compassion.

A still from SUNFLIGHT

ANANSI THE SPIDER 10 minutes/narrated 1966
Distributed by Texture Films, New York NY

ARROW TO THE SUN 12 minutes/narrated 1973
Distributed by Texture Films, New York NY

THE MAGIC TREE 10 minutes/narrated 1970
Distributed by Texture Films, New York NY

THE STONECUTTER 6 minutes/narrated 1965
Distributed by Weston Woods, Weston CT

SUN FLIGHT 6 minutes/nonverbal 1966
Distributed by McDermott Films, Box 334,
New Milford CT 06776

young viewers

Number 5: Summer/Fall 1981

film review supplement

THE FLASHETTES by Bonnie Friedman
20 minutes liveaction (New Day Films/USA) 1977

The Flashettes is the name of a winning track team in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brocklyn. It is an unusual team, comprised of six to sixteen year old Black girls. The film portrays what it is like to be a Flashette by documenting practice sessions, a talk with the young athletes' mothers, a team party, a walk through the neighborhood, and a track meet which ends with the Flashettes winning a gigantic trophy.

The sense of self-esteem that the girls get from being Flashettes is overwhelming. As their coach, a young, Black man who grew up in Bedford-Stuyvesant, says, " They don't have to die in the ghetto--they can go on and be somebody." The team members affirm this sense of reward as they discuss becoming another Wilma Rudolph and recieving college scholarships.

The kinesthetic aspects of the film were very exciting for the elementary age independent school children to whom I showed the film. Group after group responded by moving with the film during the running and dancing episodes. A first grader moved his arms back and forth examining them closely while the Flashettes' coach gave arm movement instructions to a young runner on the screen. A fourth grader said, "it makes me feel like I'm racing in it too--it was so real--my legs feel as if they'd been running with the team." Perhaps the most successful sequence in the film, from the kinesthetic point of view, is the one of the warm-up session. The girls run in place--knees high in the air, giggles exploding in all directions--with wonderful up-beat music on the soundtrack. Young viewers were highly energized by the physical and emotional exuberance displayed by the Flashettes.

A few of the youngest children complained that there was too much talking early in the film (the coach goes on at some length about why the Flashettes exist). Third and fourth graders said the talking was "OK--so you could understand what it was about," but for this age, too, the rewards were primarily kinesthetic. Only at the fifth and sixth grade levels did children really seem to understand the social implications. One child said "before their life was blah--I think it was fantastic he started the team--there aren't that many teams for Black girls."

Discussion afterwards focused primarily on winning and losing. The children recalled their own feelings about winning ribbons at their school's field day. They were appreciative of the coach's support of a weeping Flashette--"if they lost, the coach would cheer them up--that's really important--it gives them spirit." The other subject which came up continually was that of women athletes. Many wanted to talk about whether girls or boys could run faster.

Considering that the film worked primarily on the kinesthetic level, one follow-up activity might be talking about how knees and elbows work, then drawing some action pictures, perhaps using running classmates as models. Another might be some warm-ups and a good fast run around the block, or an exercise which would take advantage of the positive feelings about using the body which the film brings out in young audiences.

J.U.

Editor's note: Although THE FLASHETTES was prescreened by MCC staff, it was evaluated independently at the Calhoun school in Manhattan.

We feel it is important to point out that THE FLASHETTES and KELLY (reviewed in this issue) are valuble films in that they depict positive images of Black girls. However, it should be noted that they possibly reinforce the stereotypical idea that Blacks make it out of the ghetto by excelling in athletics. In addition, the coaches in both films are men. It would be nice to see films where women had a hand in leadership. We encourage the use of these films, but caution that you program them carefully and with sensitivity to these issues.

THE GINGERBREAD MAN by Lillian & J.P. Somersaulter
10 minutes cel animation (Perspective/USA) 1979

To the text of the popular children's story, filmmakers Lillian and J.P. Somersaulter have combined cel animation, goofy character voices, and a lively soundtrack. In the first scene, a little old man and a little old woman take a freshly baked cookie figure from the oven. The characters are outlined like drawings in a coloring book waiting to be colored in--except they move! They talk, as well. And with the help of a male narrator we are told that this cookie they are removing from the oven is a delectable gingerbread man. Hardly is the cookie out of the oven when the little fellow jumps up and announces his independence. He thumbs his nose at the elderly couple and bounds away.

As the chase begins, the black and white outlined figures are painted in with light watercolor tones, and as each new cookie-hungry character is introduced (cow, horse, pig, shopkeeper, and baker, each with its own voice and footstep sound effects) its outline is drawn by unseen hands. The sometimes classical music track is punctuated throughout by the taunting singsong chant of the gingerbread man--"I've run away from the little old woman, and I've run away from the little old man...and I can run away from you I can, I can." The nimble imp stops for a moment to greet each new character, then skips, hops, and cartwheels on,to the sound of huffing and puffing, clicking and clattering as a motley retinue stumbles after him.

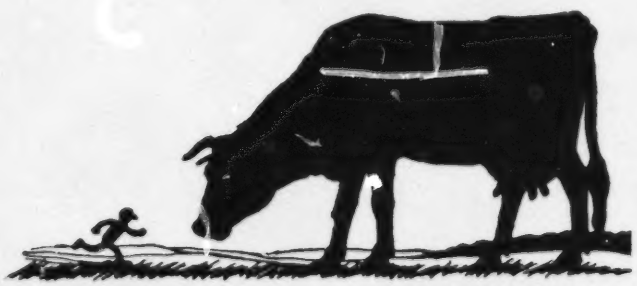
All along, the words spoken by the male narrator have appeared as text on the screen, incorporated graphically almost like a picture book. During the first half of the film, the handwritten script is present in every scene; later, however, the visualized text becomes integrated as physical elements in the chase, such as hurdles, or a hill which all the characters slide down.

When the gingerbread man arrives at a stream, the action slows down. The clever cookie escapes from his pursuers... on the tail of a fox. Suspense builds as the wiley fox uses the pretext of deepening water to coax the cookie closer and closer and closer to his/her mouth. The story ends familiarly when the gingerbread man is gobbled up.

THE GINGERBREAD MAN follows the literary tale quite closely. The characters are funny looking if a bit wooden in their movements, and, together with the unusually scripted lines, the film's design is interesting. It is, however, uncinematic with its book-like two-dimensional images and text-dominated voiceover. This did not pose any problem for young children, though; they liked it a lot. Younger children particularly were pleasantly entertained by this film. Some children (those who might have eaten the gingerbread man themselves if they could have) applauded the fox; others did not like to see the gingerbread man get eaten. Many children delightedly mimicked the cookie's voice. They even commented on the visual effect of having characters tumbling down a hill of scripted words, and liked it when the the gingerbread man pulled the words (rug-style) out from under the old couple. Children interpreted the story variously, but those under eight apparently enjoyed it. Many over-eights thought it was silly.

THE GINGERBREAD MAN is a very print-oriented film, but it works as entertainment for ages three through eight. It would also make a good lead-in for radio dramas, puppet making, or for creating handmade story books for children five to eight. It could also be used with over-eights (if you tell them to watch it for the animation techniques) as an introduction to image and word collages, book design, and postermaking.

L.L.



ICE by Nicholas Kendall, Robert Carney and Jana Vezercka
3 minutes liveaction (Canadian Distributor Center) 1973

A simple one word title flashes on screen: ICE. A pale blue color fills the frame. Slowly, one begins to distinguish fissures and small, translucent bubbles in the solid blue field. Electronic sounds, imitating dripping water, serve as the soundtrack, lending an eerie, almost science fiction quality to the film. Later shots show ice-covered trees and earth as the soundtrack builds with menacing overtones. The camera pans over the surface of a frozen lake. Suddenly a large chunk of ice slides by. Other pieces glide into view, collide and skim past. The screen fills with double exposures of sliding ice until one large frozen sheet falls and shatters. The credits roll by and the film is over.

Though ICE is a problematic, minor work, it is the type of film (a cinematic essay) often used by educators in language arts classes to expand and stimulate children's involvement with poetic imagery. For this reason and for several others, MCC was interested in testing it.

First of all we wanted to see what level the film, which was not originally made for children, operated on with them, how well they understood it and grasped the filmmaker's intention. We were also interested to learn if children would be bothered by what for us seemed to be an odd dichotomy between the soundtrack and the visuals. While the visuals represent a low-key study of the properties of ice, the music is electronic. The futuristic minimalism of the sound prepares the audience for a dramatic situation which never occurs, and somewhat obscures the film's "message."

MCC interns tested ICE in several different ways. With two classes of third and fourth graders it was screened without any introduction. The third graders enjoyed it, were interested in the music and the sliding ice, and at our suggestion invented explanations of their own for what the images were: "flying saucers"; "like the ice is playing hockey"; "looks like Iceland"; "ghosts." Fourth graders were disappointed by the film and although many made up explanations, their most significant response was to debate what the film was about.

With one group of combined third and fourth graders, ICE was shown after a short commercial about love by Franciscan Productions. It was introduced with the question, "Is this film a commercial?" Some said it was and some disagreed--"it doesn't say what brand"--but almost all were disappointed by it. Children were critical of its short length and lack of story, but possibly this was because the introduction set up false expectations for them.

We screened it another way with two different classes. In a gifted second grade,children were told they were going to see the film twice, first without and then with music. Without the music, they laughed at various parts of the film;they were neither scared nor very attentive. During the second screening, with music, they were more attentive and more stimulated verbally. Seven and eight-year-olds said it was "scary" with the music and they liked it better that way, but were unsure about whether the music went with the film. They remarked that it made them feel, "like outer space." Interestingly, children in this group said it made them feel "dizzy" with the music and "relaxed" without the music.

The film was screened in the opposite order with a gifted third grade and the responses were quite different from those of second graders mentioned earlier. With the music, viewers said the film was "spooky"; generally, they did not seem to care for it. However, during the second run through, without music, they noticed more details, made up more explanations, and responded more enthusiastically. Afterwards, they became involved in a heated discussion over which screening was better and whether or not the music fit the film.

In general, the contrast between images and music, the lack of recognizable structure, the double exposures, and the film's brevity frustrated most of the children we tested it with.

Second, third, and fourth graders did get something--perhaps a puzzling something--out of the film (the sliding ice was very appealing overall) although second graders and some third graders were more inclined to create stories which expanded on the film. It is possible ICE might work best with this age group, especially if there is some introduction to explain the lack of storyline and the eerie music.

B.W.

ISLE OF JOY by Marshall Izen 6½ minutes animation (Perspective/USA) 1971

For Henri Matisse, art was a celebration of all that gives pleasure in life. He believed that art should produce for the onlooker a feeling of tranquillity and of unity with creation. With this philosophy in mind, Matisse strove to make art in which the viewer was as much participant as observer.

Matisse's work was generally characterized by integrity of color, line, and composition; but his respect for each quality manifested itself most clearly in his buoyant cut-outs--an art form the elderly Matisse especially developed during recovery from two serious operations.

Out of frustration with being confined to a sickbed, Matisse created colorful cutouts and decorated his room with them. By painting paper with gouache, then cutting shapes with scissors, he bridged the gap between color and line. Instead of applying color to an area, as in painting, he could shape the color itself!

ISLE OF JOY is an homage to Matisse's spirit and his wonderful cutouts. This plotless, lyrical work is not an homage in the usual sense--rather it allows Matisse's art to be "described" through images which suggest "his" color and shape.

The film opens with a black line being painted on white ground. Gradually, an outline portrait of Matisse (sitting in a wheelchair, holding a pair of scissors) takes shape. Then, images resembling his brush and ink drawings of dancers and faces are shown in quick, catalog succession. Later, cutouts similar to his well-known swimmers, fish, birds, sailboats, trees, and flowers float by, one image metamorphosing into or from another. Set to the music of Debussy's "L'isle Joyeuse," the Matisse-like shapes dance in a world of color and sensual delight. The film operates on non-verbal levels and although ISLE OF JOY did not evoke many verbal responses during screenings, children were very attentive; in some classes children swayed back and forth to the music. In the post-screening discussion children mentioned "shapes," "colors," "people," "birds," "fish," and "movement," as things they remembered best about the film. They especially talked about how images changed from one into another and said that "people and other things became different shapes."

Among the nine and ten-year-olds with whom we screened ISLE OF JOY, the "nakedness" of the abstract figures (bathers, etc.) was mentioned at several sessions. Some children thought the filmmaker ought to have "put clothes on them." Generally, after discussing it among themselves, young viewers agreed that it was all right to show bodies without clothes. As one child put it, "You can't be sure if they're naked because they are only lines."

In spite of these comments, which seemed to come more from a general discomfort with the idea of nudity than from a real criticism of the filmmaker's treatment of Matisse's figures, children were enthralled with this film. They picked up on the filmmaker's intention of making a film about Matisse, but also enjoyed inventing their own stories about what was taking place. Many children likened the movement of the images to "ballet." One nine-year-old expanded on this idea and said that "the people and flowers were doing ballet and the wind was the music." Another ten-year-old interpreted the scenario by calling it "Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden."

Viewers seemed to appreciated the leeway the film's imagery gave them. At first they questioned what was happening but, as the film progressed, children became more and more involved with its subtle delight in color and change.

We found that the film worked best and was most understood when we introduced it with some background on Matisse. Our most successful introduction went as follows: "Henri Matisse was a great painter but when he grew old he became seriously ill and while recovering, he decided to make art that heals. Since he was still unable to paint, he cut shapes out of hand-colored paper and decorated his room with these compositions." The synopsis gave children just enough information for viewing this improvisational film; they were particularly impressed with the idea of art that heals.

ISLE OF JOY works fantastically for collage and paper design as well as mood and poetry activities. It would be great for programs on transformation and fantasy. It's excellent for discussions on art and art history and would be outstanding for museum programs.

M.S.

IT'S SO NICE TO HAVE A WOLF AROUND THE HOUSE
by Paul Fierlinger 12 minutes cel animation
(Learning Corporation of America/USA) 1978

In this animated domestic burlesque, set in New York City, a flamboyant interloper breathes life into a geriatric household. The film opens on a quaintly cluttered dwelling inhabited by an old man, a dog, a cat, and a fish. The male narrator wryly introduces them in storyteller fashion--verbally--in order of age (...old,... very old,...very, very old). As the cuckoo in the cuckoo clock keels over and dies, the four characters agree to advertise for a young "charming companion" to perk them up.

Enter Cuthbert Q. Divine, a wolf who passes as a German shepherd(so the narrator tells us) because of the old man's poor eyesight. Well-mannered and bursting with positive energy, Cuthbert puts the apartment in perfect order, cooks, and pays the bills. Cuthbert even entertains, improvizing a fingerpuppet skit inside an empty television set replete with song-and-dance routines and imitations of a radio sports announcer.

Since everyone has forgotten (the narrator tells us) that the house is actually a houseboat, the biggest surprise comes when Cuthbert spins the steering wheel as part of a game show routine and the boat breaks loose from its mooring. Not to worry, this allows Cuthbert to take his wards for a cruise around Manhattan--after which they all agree that thanks to Cuthbert they feel much, much younger.

As one must suspect, this is all too good to last. The old man reads a sinister newspaper headline: "Cuthbert Wanted for Rip-Offs!" and Cuthbert admits to a checkered past. In a flashback he appears as a member of the Warwolves, a motorcycle gang, riding around, looking tough, and intimidating old people. The strain of the confession is too much for Cuthbert; he collapses. After being nursed back to health by the now-envigorated old man, dog, cat, and fish, Cuthbert turns himself in to the police. He is defended in court by Lightning, the fish, who is so decrepit s/he requires a life preserver. After hearing how Cuthbert became bad in response to people's stereotypical expectations of wolves, the understanding judge releases the canine samaritan.

The final scene shows Cuthbert and his friends celebrating his return to the household. Dressed in bathing suits they all dive from the boat. The camera "pulls back" to reveal them landing in a barrel of water in the middle of the Arizona desert--their place of retirement.

Six to ten-year-olds were delighted by IT'S SO NICE...; since the film's points were blatantly obvious and not particularly challenging, children did not have to work very hard to get "the message." (Consequently, they had little to say about it afterwards, and at the end of the semester when we asked children to list their favorite films, this was one of the last to be mentioned.)

Children had much more to say about the film when we talked before the screening about other films they had seen involving wolves. IT'S SO NICE...attempts to counteract stereotypes: the man and his animal friends are initially portraved as old and apathetic but later become vivacious and resourceful; the wolf is obviously not your average vicious beast, and the dog is tender to the cat, who is, in turn, tender to the fish; therefore we discussed the notion of whether wolves are good or bad. Some children only remembered seeing bad wolves (LORD OF THE RINGS); others mentioned good wolves in THE CALL OF THE WILD, LUCAN, CAVIT, THE WOLF DOG. Together with a film like THE WOLF AND THE WHITETAIL, IT'S SO NICE TO HAVE A WOLF AROUND THE HOUSE could be used as a lead-in to a discussion about wolves' contributions to the ecosystem, or about stereotypes, with children over ten. The film is, however, an allegory and the dramatic action is very stylized, much of it approaching camp. The film's tongue-in-jowl treatment is emphasized by bouncy coffeehouse jazz (or tea dance-soap opera music) which plays intermittently on the soundtrack. The film would perhaps be most appropriate with junior high and high school students, but elementary school children enjoyed it.

G.M.

KELLY Produced by Tanya Hart for WGBH-TV, Boston
10 minutes liveaction (Indiana University/USA) 1976

KELLY is a brief sketch from the Rebop television series of a preadolescent Black girl who trains and performs with "The Flying Souls," the [illegible]'s first black trapeze troupe," in Watts, a section of Los Angeles.

The film opens with Kelly climbing a rope, instructed by her male trainer. She takes a trapeze and, in slow motion, swings through the air. In a narrated voice-over, Kelly talks about performing acrobatics, explains how she entered the troupe and worked hard to catch up with the others: several youngsters, some teenagers, and the coach's wife. The troupe's coach explains that training together offers troupe members lessons in love, respect, and discipline. He explains that their training and achievement contributes to Afro-American pride, sets an example of discipline, and brings good will to other communities through excellence in performance.

The trapeze court is surrounded by highways; the coach explains that this improves concentration by accustoming the performers to noise and distractions. Exciting shots of a training session include practice flips into the net, and various aerial acrobatics, including some misses.

As Kelly walks around her neighborhood, she talks about the "high" of training six days a week, and we see other children fighting, or hanging around aimlessly.

The film's climax is a festive performance where colorful banners reading "World's First Black Trapeze Troupe" flutter above an excited crowd. Although we have seen catches missed in training, in the performance, everything goes smoothly, to the delight of the group. Kelly tells viewers, "I feel proud."

Children were very excited by KELLY. They got especially involved in the trapeze scenes, commenting on the skill of the performers (they approved of the realism of seeing them fall during practice), and making noises of excitement and awe at the various stunts. Afterwards, children said these scenes made them feel "nervous," "dizzy," "like flying," "my stomach dropped," and mentioned things they were reminded of: "a roller coaster," "falling out of a tree," "the circus," "gymnastics," and "when I went to a party and they had a trampolene." Younger children were especially impressed by PeeWee. Our audiences were quiet and attentive during the parts which did not involve acrobatics and most children were proud of Kelly:"...makes you feel kids can do things too--normally movies are about grown-ups"; "some kids give up too easily"; "you can do anything if you want it."

Unfortunately, the film's structure, particularly at the beginning and end, seriously detracts from the story's drama. Combined with the poor sound recording, it resulted in confusion. In the opening sequence we hear a girl's voice but it is not clear to whom the voice belongs since there are several youngsters on screen. Young viewers were also confused by the chronology: Kelly talks in a voiceover about joining the troupe; is it she we observe or is she talking about the past while viewers watch a new troupe member join? The lack of clear focus on Kelly throughout most of the film leaves the audience with only a vague sense of Kelly as a person. This problem is not resolved by quick shots of Kelly's personal life--doing sit-ups with her mother, or walking in the street with her friend. Unfortunately, there are not any real conversations between any characters in the film.

It is always a risk to try to cover important concepts in a voiceover narration, particularly when the soundtrack is as muddled as in KELLY. Our audiences responded enthusiastically to the visuals, but they either ignored or were confused by the soundtrack. Some children caught

the allusion to "first Black trapeze artist," but many (including Black children) did not understand the coach's pep-talk about "doing it for the Black community." "What community?" one Black nine-year-old asked. A sixth grade class suggested redoing the ending--the public performance. They said it should have shown the act seen in rehearsals. Nothing really leads us to this scene since acrobatic training is not always done with the intention of performing and whatever preparation there was for the show is omitted from the film. Suddenly, there are people all around and banners waving! Quick cuts of the performers and the crowd generate some excitement, but meanwhile Kelly is talking about how the audience makes her feel and the film is over.

Children grasped the general point of KELLY even without being able to fully understand the voiceover; two Chinese classes, with children who spoke very little English, said they were impressed at the troupe's being all-Black. Children commented about Kelly's mother, who despite being "fat," was trying to do sit-ups; one nine-year-old was impressed because "you never see fat people on TV." The big attraction, though, was the acrobatics. Viewers were fascinated when performers intentionally dropped into the net; they speculated about what would happen if someone missed. In general, children thought the performers were great and would have loved to join in. Another nine-year-old suggested they should have shown the difficulties of a beginner.

Although KELLY is not a particularly well-made film, it deals with a popular subject, and works well as general entertainment for family audiences or groups from ages three to twelve. In addition, it can be used with seven to nine-year-olds as a discussion starter on the topic of work and sports. Also, given the lack of films in the area, it should be considered in programs dealing with active girls and with Black Americans.

L.L.

LAURIE (FEELING FREE) by Allan Brightman
14 minutes liveaction narration & dialogue
(Center for Humanities/USA) 1978

Laurie, as the twelve-year-old herself tells us in the beginning of this portrait, is blind in her right eye and sees nothing but shapes and shadows in her left eye. With a mix of voiceover narration (by Laurie) and dialogue (between Laurie, her friends, and family) the film follows Laurie through several events: talking to friends in school after the pledge of allegiance; learning, with the help of a mobility specialist, how to use a cane to navigate to the mailbox; shopping for clothes with a girlfriend; playing hide and seek with a group of pre-adolescent girls; and talking with her mother and older sister who is preparing for a prom.

After this comes "Spotlight," a question and answer period which departs from the documentary format of the first part of the film. A group of children sit informally on pillows in a studio and ask Laurie questions about her handicap and her feelings about herself. "What do you like to do?"--"Was it hard to keep up with school?" Laurie explains the use of an opticon, a scanner that communicates letters and words through her fingers, and demonstrates by reading a poem. These children, most of whom are handicapped themselves, are characters from the "Feeling Free" television series. This mini-series was developed to provide a forum for children's questions about handicaps while proving that handicaps are "only one of the many differences among people."

Laurie emerges as a mild, friendly person who appears to have the same fears and jealousies, the same needs for fun and companionship as any normal child. However, the character portrayal seemed to lack vitality and depth. Despite this and despite the fact that the film did not energize children, it was generally well received. For third through fifth graders the issue of handicaps is particularly powerful. (In fact their sense of respect made it difficult for some groups to look critically at the film because they confused it with being critical of the serious issues involved.) However, a few groups were able to appreciate the themes and intent but still be clear about how the film worked.

Most of the children we tested it with said that the filmmaker wanted to show how Laurie "doesn't let blindness stop her from living like others" and it showed that handicapped people "can do things too." Most children, expressing compassionate and positive feelings about Laurie as a handicapped child, called her "brave," "strong," and "bright." "She really wanted to do things by herself" and "she wanted to be friends." Viewers were most alert during the scenes in which Laurie goes to the mailbox, and when she is temporarily "lost" during hide and seek.

However, unlike I'LL FIND A WAY, another film about a handicapped pre-adolescent girl, (see Film Review Supplement; V.1:1, for a review of this film), LAURIE did not stimulate discussion or questions either during or after the screening. Sound and structure were the two most consistent problems mentioned by the children (although children did not label them so specifically).

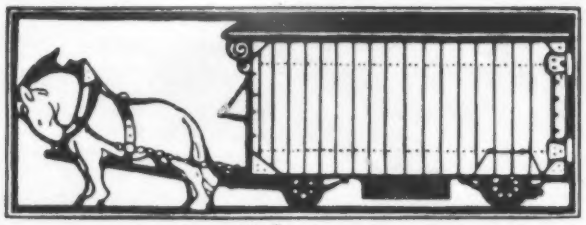
The technical quality of the sound is poor. It is muffled and hard to hear. Often the voiceover narration does not relate to the image directly so the visuals cannot help clarify the sound. Children were particularly disturbed by the "Spotlight" section. As one child explained, "Everyone interrrupted and you couldn't hear a thing." This is a shame, because many of the questions asked by children in that section anticipated what viewers might themselves want to ask Laurie.

Children said the film was "confusing" and "hard to clear up in your mind." One fourth grader offered this analysis: "They just switched topics too fast." Another child said "It's hard to understand because first she's running and then she's doing another thing and another thing." One group of children spontaneously compared LAURIE to I'LL FIND A WAY which was clearly divided into distinct episodes with easy-to-follow transitions. LAURIE, on the other hand, uses no clear visual or aural clues to mark transitions from episode to episode. This structural flaw makes it confusing. Also, the choice of activities protrayed is somewhat unrevealing. Children said the "categories [of activities] were boring"; in contrast to I'LL FIND A WAY where the imagery and activity is so rich, LAURIE hasn't the visual content to stimulate discussion. (The filmmakers must have been aware of this since they tried to bolster the visuals with a voiceover narration; but poor sound quality made the attempt fail.)

The lack of clear focus and the poor sound made LAURIE unsuccessful with younger children, who picked up on the actual content (because they are not yet familiar with what they are "supposed to get" from this type of values clarification film) rather than the intended content. One eight-year-old, for example, said that the film was made to "show people who aren't handicapped how hard it is for handicapped people." This understanding is quite different from the intent of the "Feeeling Free" series. When asked what she meant in saying "life was hard for Laurie, " another eight-year-old said that it was sad when Laurie played hide-and-seek because she could not see where they were hiding, and everyone left her." While the scene is going on Laurie's voiceover narration says, "Kids this year know I can take my bumps and bruises."

The film manages to attain some of its goals. It was better understood by older children, in part because they have already learned how to decode this type of presentation. But, the film seems to reinforce the distance between normal children and handicapped children: it seems to reinforce "there but for the grace of God..." thinking. As one fourth grader said, the film made her feel "lucky that I'm not blind." We recommend LAURIE for use only with fifth and sixth graders.

M.L.F.



LITTLE BIG TOP by Torben Schioler & Tony Ianzelo
9 minutes liveaction (National Film Board of Canada)
1977

LITTLE BIG TOP gives an intimate, behind-the-scenes look at a small Canadian travelling circus. The informal documentary camera work and the lively soundtrack (spiced with short calliope passages) blend to convey the spontaneity, enthusiasm, and hard work of the high grass circus troupe's private world. Using quick cuts from glamorous performances to shots emphasizing strenuous preparation, the film traces the evolution of a "show" and reveals the comraderie which enables members to live, work and perform together.

Chronologically ordered so as to give viewers an overall day-in-the-life perspective, LITTLE BIG TOP concentrates on the troupe's ritual of putting on their show in a succession of new towns. The film opens on a field in which a dozen or so large truck trailers are enveloped in predawn mist. Inside one of the trailers, a clown puts on make up, mugs for the camera and talks about children's responses to his act. Nearby, the fire eater coaches his understudy. A woman trains a group of young acrobats who are, at best, only average. By focusing equally on apprentices and first-stringers, the director conveys a sense of the training and perserverance involved in performing.

But performing is only part of the circus. The performers' practice time is limited, since everyone's labor is required to put on the show. Once the trailer caravan pulls into a new site, the animals are unloaded and everyone helps to set up for that evening's performance. Elephants haul giant tent poles into place under the big top. Local youngsters help as troupe members unroll canvasses, secure ropes and erect grandstands. The atmosphere hums with the tension and excitement of an opening night. Finally when everything is ready--when tickets have been sold and an eager audience is seated--it's show time!

Children of all ages were delighted by this film. Sequences involving animals were best liked; children loved the acrobatic dog and viewers' favorite "star" was the elephant--most groups remarked about the scenes where the elephant drinks coffee, eats donuts, and takes a bath. Interestingly, many younger children expressed concern when the elephant was used for hard work; some eight-year-olds said it "did all the work" or was "like a slave" and this made them "feel sad." Older children, on the other hand, seemed to accept this as part of its job and expressed awe at the animal's strength. Most children recalled images of clowns, or mentioned them as things the film reminded them of, but none of the children laughed at their acts, and in several groups said they should have put on funnier acts. A few younger children suggested the film should have shown more clowns or have even been entirely about clowns.

Five to seven-year-olds, generally uninterested in the adults in the film, were highly excited by the fire eater--especially when flames rose up from his tongue and fingers. Eleven and twelve-year-olds were fascinated by the problems of running a circus and the "tricks of the trade"; several commented that skipping around via quick cuts was an "interesting way" of showing this. One twelve-year-old volunteered that "it was more toward our age level." Younger children also enjoyed seeing how a circus works, that it "doesn't get ready by itself," although some complained of being "tired from all that work" and others thought "the film was too long."

LITTLE BIG TOP can be used with under-eights to generate discussions about animals and their uses, or to inspire creating a circus (as a table-top model or full-scale pageant). Older groups may find this film a valuable lead-in to discussing jobs or how communities work. LITTLE BIG TOP is fine for family audiences from the age of four on up, and it works best with children over ten. Its special significance is that, although most circus films are considered "kidstuff" (meaning young children), this documentary is appropriate for and best understood by older children.

L.L.

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD by Red Grooms
16 minutes liveaction cel animation (American Federation for the Arts/USA) 1978

"This is going to be horrible--Little Red Riding Hood is for babies," said one third grader while the class groaned in agreement. Little did they know what was coming--the Red Grooms version of the traditional tale is a zany slapstick comedy--a celebration of the ridiculous complete with out-of-sync dubbed voices, nonsensical sound effects, rinky-tink piano accompaniment, and hilarious fast-paced chase scenes, á la Keystone Cops.

The cast of characters includes Little Red Riding Hood, a preadolescent, dark-haired beauty, who appears very sweet and innocent at first. Later on, however, she gets a little bratty, and at one point even sticks her tongue out at a scarecrow in whose garden she is trespassing. Grandma is portrayed in a frumpy bathrobe robe and cap and has a very red nose and eyes due to a cold. The wolf (really a man in a wolf suit) wears big, oversized sneakers and likes to take naps. We are also introduced to a stuffed canary who sings, a postman who bicycles into trees, a man covered with pots and pans who is prone to falling down, a shy scarecrow, and two woodsmen who run a lot--right into each other. The film is done in a circus-mood evoked by brightly colored costumes, accentuated make-up, obviously fake sets, and a lot of clowning around.

In all our screenings, the kids were initially preoccupied with the style. We heard comments like, "What is this?...; That's not a real bird...; The little girl isn't even talking when you hear her voice." After a while, children couldn't resist laughing especially at the sight of the wolf relaxing in a

hammock. Many roared when the wolf was chasing Little Red inside grandma's house. During every screening they were very talkative and were attentive throughout. Most children were curious about the techniques used in the film; we heard many versions of "How do they do that?" followed by explanations--"they put it in fast motion so it looks jerky like that."

Typically, two scenes evoked spontaneous comment by most groups, particularly in discussions after the screenings. The first was when Little Red Riding Hood sticks out her tongue at the scarecrow when he reprimands her for stealing his carrots. Many children were bothered by this because it seemed so unmotivated. Many stated that Little Red was "bad"--one fourth grader said she was "ashamed of her." Children also expressed concern about the last scene in which the woodsmen cut open the wolf, allowing Little Red, Grandma, and a few chickens to emerge unharmed; however, this concern was short-lived as soon as other children explained that, "it was all a fake--it wasn't real" and "it was meant to be funny."

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD provoked a variety of responses. It left many young viewers excited, but frustrated; apparently young children were too "literal" to enjoy this spoof. Although many said it was "foolish" or "for babies," sixth graders responded better to Red Grooms' zaniness. When asked why the filmmaker made the film, one fifth grader replied, "so people could crackup." Some older children were critical; they felt "left out of the fun." One ten-year-old said, "to have a good time but he shouldn't have tried to show it to other people."

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD works well as a storyline for creative dramatics. Generally it works best with preadolescents or adults who can better understand the sophisticated yet goofy humor of Red Grooms and company.

M.A.R.

THE MAGIC FLUTE by Gayle Thomas 8 minutes
animation (National Film Board of Canada) 1977

THE MAGIC FLUTE is a nonverbal crayon animation set to flute music. The storyline (no relation to Mozart's) revolves around a flute that produces either beautiful or ugly sounds and images, depending on the character of the person who plays it.

The film opens as a young boy discovers an abandoned flute. He cleans it, and to his surprise, when he plays it the flute takes him on a visual tour of stars, butterflies and balloons. While exchanging a giant flower for an umbrella, he passes the flute on to another child--(then a series of children) who participates in the experience of this wondrous instrument. When a nasty boy steals the flute, however, the pattern is broken. For him, the flute produces only horrifying images--devils, witches, clouds of dust and howling winds. Disgusted, the tough-looking boy throws the flute to the ground and stomps on it. A girl soon discovers the abandoned flute, lovingly dusts it off, and begins to play it. Again the screen is alive with colors, balloons, rainbows, stars and flowers--all to the accompaniment of lilting music.

This simple, tightly constructed piece works well with young children, especially grades one to three. Most of the classes we screened it with found the story clear and moving. They understood and could easily identify with the themes of sharing and friendship. Young viewers became so involved in the film that they "oohed" and "aahed," called out to characters, and pretended to play imaginary flutes.

Questions about the film ("How did it make you feel?"--"What did you think about the music?") elicited these comments from a gifted second grade class: "Feels like flying"; "dreaming"; "like my imagination taking me on a trip around the world"; "felt like riding on a shooting star"; "like swimming in the sky." Only the "fight" scene (with the nasty boy) made young children uneasy and they became noticeably quieter during that part of the film.

Older children (fourth, fifth, and sixth graders) were less strongly affected by the film; nonetheless, most responded favorably. Typical comments from one fourth grade were: "It's about kindness." ; "The magic depends on who is using the flute."; "I play some of that music on the recorder." Another fourth grade class gave a running commentary on the plot and the images.

In our prescreening evaluation, many MCC staff members and interns felt that the film used rather banal behavior examples and symbols (i.e., a rainbow for happiness, a witch for evil, fighting for bad behavior). Because these symbols were so obvious, however, the film was easily understood by young children. Older children, on the other hand, are capable of decoding symbols of greater complexity and originality. Perhaps the film simply operated for older children on the recognition level; it was no challenge for their interpretive skills and generated no real excitement.

THE MAGIC FLUTE works best with first and second graders (and might also work well with kindergarten children). It works well when screened alone and followed by an arts activity involving crayons, such as drawing and crayon relief. (For a description of the crayon relief technique, see Ireene Robbins' book, Arts and Crafts Ideas for the Elementary Teacher published by Parker Publishing in West Nyack, New York.) THE MAGIC FLUTE also works well as part of a program on sharing, kindness, or friendship.

B.W.

THE MOLE AND THE EGG by Zenek Miler 6 minutes
cel animation (Pheonix/Czechoslovakia) 1975

THE MOLE AND THE EGG is another installment in the series of animated, nonverbal Mole films. In this one, Mole burrows his/her way up from the ground and surfaces right under an egg. Mole wonders who it could belong to and begins to search for the owner, showing the egg to mice, rabbits and dogs. It does not belong to any of them. A truck loaded with eggs drives by and Mole, with egg in tow, hops a ride, apparently in hopes of finding a home for the egg.

When the truck unloads its contents at the factory, Mole and egg end up on a conveyor belt heading straight for a machine that cracks eggs into a huge vat of swirling dough! In the midst of peril, Mole's egg hatches, producing a little chick of whom Mole becomes very protective. Together the two small creatures narrowly avoid being caught in rotary beaters, cookie molds, and ovens, but they are eventually packed into the same cookie box. Just before being loaded into a delivery truck they slip out and run away.

Then Mole encounters a weeping hen who sees the chick and excitedly nods her head in recognition. The baby chick scurries into its mother's loving embrace.

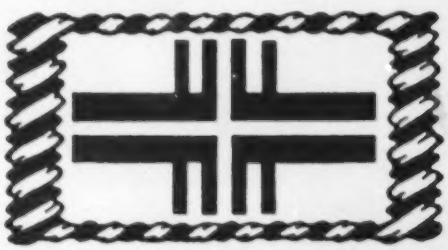
We screened THE MOLE AND THE EGG with third and fourth graders. Throughout the screening, children were very attentive, giving minimal verbal responses. Most children laughed a lot during the film (especially at the factory scenes) and seemed to enjoy swaying back and forth to the sweet oom-pah-pah music. Comments were primarily about about the two main characters, the loudest being, "Oh, he's so cute," when the chick hatched. Applause followed most of our screenings and one satisfied third grader said, "That was super."

Many children mentioned that the music and sound effects were great and that there was "no need for words."

When asked if the film reminded them of anything, children said, "It was a cartoon...; Woody Woodpecker getting into trouble...; Tom and Jerry cartoons...;and Charlie Chaplin--done to music." We also asked them what the film was about and got the responses, "a mole trying to find a chicken's mother" and "two animals in a factory." We finally asked them why they thought the filmmaker made the film and almost all agreed, "to make little kids laugh" or "[She or] he thought it would be fun to make a funny little film" or "to entertain us."

Most children obviously enjoyed THE MOLE AND THE EGG and their comments indicated that the film was operating largely on the entertainment level. Although we didn't test it with preschool children, it is likely that it would work well with four to seven-year-olds. A pleasant film, it could also work in machine programs for under-tens.

M.A.R.



MURATTI GREIFT EIN by Oskar Fischinger 4 minutes object animation/nonverbal (Creative Film Society/ Germany) 1934

In an upbeat opening white stick-like cylinders with gold tips march in time to lively ballet music (segments from Die Puppenfee by Bayer). Pairs of marching sticks, or legs without torsos, emerge from behind red, white, gold, and black rectangular boxes, multiplying into geometric formations. Dwarfed by the boxes, which rise like military banners above them, the legs kick-step in procession, forming columns on parade.

The music changes to a waltz tempo, and the legs glide and sway in choreographed unison. With a combination of anthropomorphic grace and mathematical precision, they interweave--alternately resembling ice skaters and the chorus line of a Busby Berkeley musical--as the camera simulates complex tracking shots.

In the film's closing segment, the camera pulls back from the marching, dancing figures and the crowd of spectators to reveal a blue Alpine mountain in the background. As a brightly painted red sun rises above the mountain, the word "Muratti" curves in a semi-circle around the sun. Then, as the music reaches its climax, the camera pans over a stately array of old-fashioned tin boxes rotating majestically in what resembles a giant outdoor arena or gymnasium.

Oskar Fischinger, who made MURATTI GREIFT EIN (or MURATTI MARCHES ON), was an avant-garde animator in Germany before World War II and is considered by many film scholars to be one of the great original filmmakers. After working initially in black and white, Fischinger began experimenting with color in the early 1930's--but the political situation in Germany soon impinged on his ability to work. Abstract art was considered degenerate by the Nazis because it could be interpreted in a variety of ways. (Although certainly the the least abstract of his films, MURATTI... is open to various interpretations. It could be a spoof on the vast goose-stepping rallies of the Hitler era; those headless legs are mindless, and they move with a delicate clock-like motion--much like automatons.)

Fischinger emigrated to the United States in 1936 and settled in Hollywood where he collaborated with the Disney Studio on the Bach sequence of FANTASIA: due, however, to a later dispute with Disney, his name was not listed in the credits. Fischinger continued to make films--lyrical, abstract works set to music--and his great strength as an artist is the solid unity between image, movement, feeling and sound. Among his other films are COMPOSITION IN BLUE (1937), OPTICAL POEM (1939), and ALLEGRETTO (1936). (We have successfully screened ALLEGRETTO with children and family audiences and will, at some later date, try his other works.)

While this object animation tour de force was made as a commercial for Muratti cigarettes, the cigarettes and their boxes are quite abstracted; they suggested a myriad of images to young viewers. During many screenings children delighted in guessing what the objects were ("the Rockettes," "a parade march," "an army," "toothpicks") and what they were doing ("skating," "dancing," "marching"). Many children did not realize that the sticks were cigarettes; a few called them "magic markers" or "lipsticks."

Children generally seemed to enjoy the film on a kinesthetic level; they said it made them feel, "happy," "awake" and "alive." Many commented on the lively music and how well it was coordinated with the movement. Most were so intrigued by MURATTI's visual imagery that the absence of a traditinal storyline did not bother them. In discussions after the film, children often inquired about the filmmaking technique; they questioned how the objects moved and offered their own explanations--stating that the filmmaker used "magnets under the floor" or "strings" to manipulate the objects.

We tested the film with graphic arts activities such as collage and print making (see Merrill Lee Fuch's article, "Sinkenkong and Kalamazoo: A Media Center Film/Activity Session" in Young Viewers, Vol. 4:2) but the film would be a wonderful addition to music and movement programs. Since we found that it evoked very descriptive associations, MURATTI... could also be used as a poetry stimulator. In addition, it could be used to teach animation or as part of a program on the history of film.

Once children have had a chance to appreciate the film on a kinesthetic and artistic level, MURATTI GREIFT EIN could be screened and studied for its impact and merit as a commercial; in this context it could serve very well for consumer awareness and critical viewing skills development--however, this use is best saved for the second or third screening. It seems counterproductive to take away children's pleasure in the dancing objects by making them analyze its techniques or intentions on first viewing; besides increasing their understanding of its impact as a commercial, allowing them to experience the film esthetically will help them appreciate the work of this historically important film artist.

In addition to its other uses, we recommend MURATTI GREIFT EIN for art classes and museum education programs (see M. L. Fuchs' article mentioned above). The film works very well with children over six and although we haven't tested it sufficiently with younger children, it seems to work well with under-sixes too. Naturally, the film also works with adults--it was designed as a commercial to be shown between films at movies houses--but it helps adults (particularly parents in a family screening) appreciate it better if they know something about its historical significance.

MCC Staff

OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER by Carol & Ross Lowell
14 minutes liveaction/narration & dialogue (Pyramid/USA)
1979

This, as one second-grader commented, is a "heart-warming" film. The poignant and amusing portrait of brotherly love and ambivalence, made by the subjects' parents, combines the best aspects of a tender drama and a funny home movie.

As the film begins, six-year-old Josh, cowboy hat casually pushed back from his face, toys with a baby doll on his bed. (Because of the doll and Josh's page-boy haircut--as well as their unfamiliarity with the name Josh, some children mistakenly assumed Josh was a girl.)

"This used to be my doll," Josh says in a voiceover narration, "but now it's Evan's." Then from a small collection of treasures, he extracts snapshots of his brother Evan as an infant. Wistfully, Josh comments that, since he turned two, "Evan doesn't want to kiss me any more." Meanwhile, Evan gleefully plays on an indoor swing in the bedroom the boys share. Evan shows his older brother the tricks he can do and, pulled by urges to both compete and participate, Josh joins Evan in acrobatics on the swing.

To a solo flute accompaniment, the boys play outside among fallen leaves on a beautiful autumn day. Within a short time, their play moves from enjoyment to tears as Josh knocks Evan down. Older boy consoles younger boy, apologizing, and tries to shift the mood by entertaining Evan with a repertoire of silly faces.

Later on their mother rakes as they roll and tumble in the colorful leaves. Josh excitedly throws leaves at Evan until the younger boy rambunctiously hits his older brother in the face. Josh runs to his mother for comfort, followed jealously by Evan who also wants to be held.

Each scene is a vignette that reveals another aspect of the boys' relationship. In an image recalling the Shepherd illustration (from When We Were Very Young) where Christopher Robin sits half-way up and half-way down the stairs, the boys have a revealing mid-stair discussion about love. In that netherworld of not-up and not-downstairs, Evan announces that he loves only Mommy. Josh, wise in the ways of love, tries to educate his younger brother by example: "I love Mommy, Daddy, and you; I can love lots of people." The discussion fails to convince Evan to admit that he loves Josh, so Josh tries another tack; he regresses to infancy, pretending to be Evan's baby. Tenderly, Evan strokes Josh's brow and incants, "My baby! My baby!", as the older boy drinks from the younger boy's bottle.

In another scene, Josh is busily constructing the World Trade Center with blocks. Evan wants to help. Josh says he is too young. Determined, Evan adds a block and the scene builds with delicious tension (produced in part by the low camera angle and the accompanying music) to the not entirely surprising collapse of the structure.

At the end of the (film's) day, Josh is playing alone in the bathtub. Evan climbs the stairs to look for him. Dressed for bed in his blue Doctor Denton's, Evan enters the bathroom and, to squeals of forbidden pleasure, climbs fully clothed into the tub.

Later, lights are out and the boys are in bed. Josh is sound asleep but Evan is still awake, playing with his doll. He calls to Josh and, when he gets no reply, climbs onto his brother's bed. In a tender and wonderfully ironic moment, which is perfectly in keeping with the behavior of a two-year-old, Evan gives Josh the long-sought-after kiss.

The last scene is perhaps the most obviously "scripted" segment. The leitmotif of the kiss, however, is a wonderful linking device: it not only symbolized the film's theme and conflict, it gave this portrait a cohesive, almost narrative structure. Even the voiceover, which as happens in child-narrated works was barely audible at times, did not interfere with children's understanding; because the evolving "storyline" is strongly based on action and simple exposition of the characters, children said the film was "easy to understand." Its clear structure and rootedness in the concrete experience of childhood give OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER a universal appeal. In fact, it works as well with adults as it does with young viewers.

Children were generally animated and involved during the screening, alternately laughing, calling out anticipated actions, and observing pensively (apparently when they were identifying with the boys' feelings.) The film was amazingly successful with grades one through six, although there were differences among groups in the levels of their response. Some groups, including even very young children, tuned in to the boys' feelings and talked about the problems and delights of having a younger/older sibling (the companionship and competition; the worshipful imitation and stubborn rejection; the conflict between dependence and independence; and the alternating desires to be a big kid and to hold onto outgrown modes of behavior). Some groups talked more about the boys' behavior--having anticipated much of it during the screening. Children spontaneously imitated Evan's way of talking and responded favorably to the music. Both old and young groups eagerly discussed the film and recalled favorite scenes: "when he got in the bathtub with his p.j.'s"; "when Evan broke the Empire State Building"; "when Evan's diaper broke"; "looking at the photos [in the opening of the film]"; "when the boys threw leaves and got all dirty"; "when they were looking at the book [on the stairs]"; "when Josh put his head on Evan's knee and Evan said, 'baby'." In discussions afterward many said it made them think of younger or older sisters and brothers and recalled incidents when they or a younger sibling got hurt. Other children's discussions turned generally to how it felt to be young. (Interestingly, hardly any children mentioned the kiss. Perhaps it was clearly only a metaphor; perhaps they understood it was not the subject of the film. Very likely, other images and other actions held more significance for them.)

OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER makes a wonderful introduction to portraits in a museum or art education curriculum and fits very well into a family unit in the social studies curriculum. It is also a fantastic general audience film. We screened it along with several other films at our annual Family Film Festival at the American Museum of Natural History during the Washington's Birthday Holiday and it was enthusiastically received by everyone from age two on up. In addition to all its other virtues, the film presents an image of boy children as complex, vulnerable, loving and capable of expressing their feelings as well as their needs; it would fit perfectly into a unit on non-stereotypical sex roles.
[For more information about this aspect of the film, see Ellen Schecter's article in this issue.]

A.M.B.

PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY by Eliot Noyes, Jr.
1 minute pixillated animation/nonverbal (Unifilm/USA) 1976

The childhood passion for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches is taken to delightful extremes in this zany portrait of a peanut butter and jelly fiend.

Filmmaker Eliot Noyes' younger brother, Fred, walks up to an elegantly set table, complete with silver service and candlesticks, and prepares to dine. Rapidly (due to stop-motion photography), the young man arranges a loaf of bread, jelly and peanut butter, then lights the candles. After placing a napkin under his chin, Fred plunges the knife into the peanut butter and spreads it on a slice of bread. Next he adds a glob of jelly, then more peanut butter, more jelly, and another piece of bread. He prepares sandwich after sandwich at a pace that would please a fast-food eatery. When an entire loaf of bread has been made into peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, variously oozing and dripping with the sticky spreads, Fred begins consuming his gastronomic creation.

Slowly at first, but with increasing speed, he stuffs sandwich after sandwich into his mouth in an amazing display of gourmandise. When the entire loaf is gone and his face and hands have become almost one with their covering of goo, Fred cleans up. He fastidiously (and in real-time photography) wipes his hands and face, cleans the crumbs from the table, blows out the candles, rises and departs.

The entire scenario is set to the energizing rhythm of a human hand percussion (slapping, clapping) accompanied by a nonsense syllable or scat vocal track--a soundtrack that reinforces the film's playful tone. As one child put it," the music [sic] made it seem like he was having a good time."

While most children enjoyed the nuttiness of the film and understood that the filmmaker "was kidding," some--perhaps the more fastidious--were uncomfortable with the young man's messiness. Most children responded to this work on a visceral level and seemed to prefer miming the action to talking afterwards; because of this, the film would make a natural lead-in to movement or dramatic activities. Fourth and fifth graders were playfully indignant at Fred's atrocious manners; they seemed to enjoy his forbidden behavior as much as their awareness of a time in their own lives when, as babies, they were not aware of manners as such.

We screened PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY with OH BROTHER, MY BROTHER((which is also reviewed in this issue) for a program on portraits. Both films were combined (with PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY first) so that children could compare and discuss the different approaches the filmmakers took to their subjects. One portrait was by a brother, using his brother as (the apparent) subject; the other was about two brothers, made by the boys' parents. One portrait was fanciful and silly; the other was realistic and tender.

Since the pixillated technique and silliness of PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY was highly energizing (and we had still another film to screen), we ran the film backwards to calm children down and, as one child said, to "undo the mess."

PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY could be successfully used for a unit on food in the elementary school curriculum and could also be used as an introduction to either film portraits (in a critical viewing curriculum) or non-film portraits (both painted and sculpted) in an art gallery. Other possibilities include programs with follow-up acitivities related to storytelling, collage and drama. But the most compelling reason to use the film--an attribute of Eliot Noyes' creative gifts-- is that it is great fun for all ages.

A.M.B.

PONIES OF MIKAELENGI by Gary Templton
25 minutes liveaction (Pheonix/Iceland) 1979

In the setting of an Iceland spring, this film traces the adventures of two children caught in an unexpected earthquake. PONIES OF MIKAELENGI opens with a man and his two children, Gumi and Annie, herding sheep on ponies. Three sheep wander off and the man tells the children to wait until the next day to track them down. In the morning, brother and sister set out on their ponies, one of which is about to give birth. They take in a lot of Icelandic scenery while searching for stray sheep. At home, an earthquake shakes the house--and the adults in the family, who worry about the children's well-being.

Meanwhile, Gumi and Annie continue their search. Just when they find the sheep, the earth begins to tremble. After falling unharmed from a steep cliff, the children decide to return home. Almost immediately, the pregnant pony collapses in labor and the other pony gallops off, leaving the children stranded.

Just in time, the runaway pony comes across the children's father who has set out to find them. "Take me to them," shouts Father to the pony. When he arrives a new colt is standing next to its mother. While Father, Gumi, and Annie admire the foal, the lost sheep are retrieved by the dog. All return home safe and happy.

In the book from which the film is adapted, Ponies of Mykillengi by Lonzo Anderson, a storm, an earthquake and a volcanic eruption, are included. Wisely, the filmmaker limited the disaster to only one. However, nine and ten-year-olds were concerned that parts of the film, such as the earthquake scene, seemed "fake." They discussed how one would simulate an earthquake in film, suggesting "shake the camera and push rocks," and "make something under the grass shake." Other parts were "too long," the family evening folksing, for example. While the landscape scenery is lovely, the acting is stilted (the dialogue seemed out of sync or dubbed; children said "the voices sounded funny"). Moreover the music is a bit too "instructive"; it perhaps more than anything else cues viewers into what is going on.

Young viewers were delighted by the animals and relatively unconcerned with the fate of their human companions; particularly with seven-year-olds, we often heard the comment "I love ponies." We felt the scenes

that were most important to the storyline were either handled poorly (explained with dialogue rather than captured cinematically) or, as in the birth of the colt, simply not dealt with.

PONIES...is okay for ages six through ten, and is suitable for family programs.

S.R.

TRANSFER by Eric Durst 10 minutes cel animation/ nonverbal (Eric Durst/USA) 1978

A contemporary and surreal fantasy about the journeys of a young urban everyman. Animated in flat and poster-like images (with a lot of gray and secondary colors), the film begins with the man waiting on a platform. A subway arrives. He enters the car and, while sitting there, encounters a series of bizarre (but to those who travel subways, not unlikely) characters including a woman with an obnoxious pet cat, a strange rubber-necked pickpocket, and an evangelical preacher.

Tiring of this passing parade, the young man looks up at one of the ubiquitous posters that decorate subway cars and stations. There is a bird in the poster. Suddenly, the man is there with the bird which he catches by a tether and follows into the sky. After a while, the man parachutes to the ground and lands in a forest depicted on the wall of a subway station.

Except for occasional lines of dialogue (mostly by the preacher), the film functions on a nonverbal level and is, indeed, highly visual. As with THE WONDER RING, with with which we paired TRANSFER in our screenings, we told children that there were hardly any words and suggested that they should make up the story as the film progressed. The third and fourth graders labelled things as they happened and often anticipated outcomes (especially with the cat and the pickpocket); they specifically commented about the lack of graffiti on the subway. Some thought the film was about "daydreaming" and "fantasy," while others thought it was about a man who was "going crazy." Many groups enjoyed it even though, as they said, "it didn't make sense." Perhaps it makes a good analogy to surviving in the city, perhaps it also speaks to the withdrawal that begins with adolescence.

Our most successful screening is documented in this issue, in "Fear and Elation in P.S. 105." During the screening, TRANSFER was used as a stimulus for a group poetry activity, but the film would also work as a lead-in to postermaking activities since posters are so prominent in the film and the animation style is poster-like. Although it would work with junior high and high school-age youngsters, TRANSFER worked with groups from third grade on up when it was carefully placed in context for the children.

A.M.B.

VOLCANO: BIRTH OF A MOUNTAIN by Bert Van Bork 24 minutes liveaction (EncyclopediaBritannica Educational Corporation/USA) 1977

"It's blood!"
"No, it's lava."
"Looks like firecrackers."
"They don't need fireworks in Hawaii."

These were a few of the comments made by third and fourth graders during a screening of VOLCANO: BIRTH OF A MOUNTAIN, a film which documents, in sequence, the formation of a volcanic mountain.

Though the island of Hawaii had been free of any volcanic activity for quite a while, on May 24, 1969 an eruption took place at Kilauea, Hawaii's largest volcano. Five years later, volcanic eruptions had changed the face of the island and had created a new land form: Mauna Ulu, which means "growing mountain." Scientists at Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, led by Donald W. Peterson, Ph.D., followed the growth of Mauna Ulu. Their work, as well as the awesome volcano, are the subjects of this film.

From aerial views of the Hawaiian islands to graphic close-ups of flowing lava, this film is filled with spectacular images. The narration offers a great deal of factual information on volcanoes. There are different kinds of volcanic eruptions: fountains of molten, red lava shoot up as high as the Empire State Building, and underground rivers of lava, called "tubes," run just below the thin, fragile crust of earth.

Viewers see how close scientists must get to the active volcano in order to gather and record data. Cameras follow them in their dangerous efforts: nearing the edge of the giant crater, flying in helicopters above the volcano, standing on the crust above the "lava tubes," even going under water to observe molten lava spilling into the ocean and expanding the coastline as it hardens.

Then, at the end of five years of attentive research, after numerous eruptions have added new layers to the landscape, the great volcano becomes dormant, leaving Mauna Ulu, Hawaii's newest mountain.

Despite a somewhat overly adult narration, our audiences loved this film. Some first and second graders found it "too long and talky," but they stayed with the film. The lava was the center of attention in all classes and some first graders were both fascinated and scared by it. We heard comments like, "a waterfall of lava"; "like being trapped with lots of ketchup"; "anybody gets trapped in there, they die automatically"; "Hawaii people don't live so good"; "scary." Although VOLCANO worked well with six to eight-year-olds, introducing the film helped children of this age. We suggest telling them it might look a bit scary, then asking if they would like to sit next to a friend.

The film was of particular interest for grades three and up, since they were better able to analyze the events and follow the narration. Most of them were already interested in the subject--either from having visited the Pompeii exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History or from the news reports about eruptions at Mount St. Helens which added to their involvement with the film. Older children, in light of the danger involved, were particularly appreciative of the effort made by the scientists: "It made me nervous--they went too near"; "They knew what they were doing"; "I'm happy that those scientists risked their lives to find out for others."

VOLCANO provides a terrific experience for young and adult viewers; with virtually all our test groups (grades one through six) it was a tremendous hit. During the screening, childrens' eyes were riveted to the screen and weeks later they asked to see it again.

An excellent natural science film, VOLCANO can be programmed on its own, in conjunction with a shorter film, or as part of a geology lesson on volcanoes. For most groups it needs no introduction, but it does require time afterwards, since it stimulates rich imagery and a need for discussion. It might by fun to ask children to build a miniature, working volcano out of paper maché, plaster of paris, or clay.

B.W.

THE WONDER RING by Stan Brakhage 4 minutes
liveaction/silent (Museum of Modern Art/USA) 1955

In dream-like silence, the viewer seems to become a camera in this unusual portrait of the Third Avenue El, an above-ground subway that survived in New York City until the late fifties.

There is no "establishing shot" as such, close-ups of steps are the first images we see, followed by somewhat disconnected shots of doors and windows with interesting glass patterns (what children called "Chinese windows"). We are in a run-down subway station with an eerie, decaying beauty.

A train arrives and, as camera movement accelerates, viewers enter the car of a train which travels through the city. We see our fellow travelers and pass a jumble of city buildings. The train stops and starts. People come and go. Then, through a pane of irregular, rippled glass, an image of the city is transformed into an abstraction. Reflections in the car's windows further distort our perception of what is real, what is shadow.

Like dreamers or ghosts--disembodied observers--we travel through the filmmaker's city on his subway. Brakhage manages to fuse concrete, sensual images and a uniquely personal vision into a lyric film poem on the now-defunct elevated line. In discussing it, one fourth grader said the film "looks like imagining."

THE WONDER RING was not exactly easy for elementary school children, but (as you can read in "Fear and Elation in P.S. 105" in this issue) the film succeeded when it was very carefully handled. We used it primarily as a lead-in to language arts activities since the filmmaker's juxtaposition, repetition and variation of images functions very like a poem.

With our encouragment to talk out loud during the screening, one third-fourth grade made up "the story of what was happening" in which a newspaper reporter who had made his fortune returned "to see how he used to live when he was poor." In other screenings, children were encouraged to talk during the film, their running commentary (labelling and discussing images) helped them stay with this demanding work.

Several children delighted in being able to "see people inside and out"--a reference to the reflected images on the glass, and, interestingly for a silent film, certain children talked about the film's sounds in follow-up discussions. One child said that "when the train was stopping, [something was] making a squeaking sound"; another said that it "seems like you would hear talking." We are not sure what this means; however, the same phenomenon has occurred when the film is screened with adults. Perhaps some viewers feel the need to flesh out the silence with sound. Perhaps the images trigger memories of sounds they have experienced on the subway. This aspect of the film does suggest that sound activities would make an interesting follow-up.

Children talked generally about subways in discussions afterwards and, in particular, mentioned the old-fashioned look of the cars--"like they were made of wood"--and compared "the El" to other elevated trains they had taken in locations as diverse as Boston, Brooklyn and New Rochelle.

Since our children were familiar with subways, they may have had a special relationship to the subject which children who have never ridden this type of public transportation may not be able to share. Nonetheless, with an introduction (that prepares children for its silence, lack of storyline, and impressionistic style) and a well-structured follow-up, THE WONDER RING works fantastically for language arts activities with children eight and older. It could also work with collage activities, photography and gallery tours--particularly because of the way Brakhage frames his images.

A.M.B.

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